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ABSTRACT

In this collection, 32 Alaskan principals, retired principals, assistant principals, and principals-to-be share their experiences as administrators and reflect on their feelings about the nature of the work and about schooling issues in Alaska. Nine of the writings were selected from "Totem Tales," the newsletter of Alaska's Association of Secondary School Principals. These brief pieces discuss entry level difficulties; building good relationships with students, teachers, and the community; cross-cultural issues in Native Alaska villages; experiences in very small, rural schools; handling financial problems; the principal as jack-of-all-trades; high risk students; school improvement programs; innovations in reading and writing instruction and vocational education; substance abuse problems; student discipline; and experiences with very cold weather, exploding volcanos, and wild animals. Black and white drawings by student artists illustrate the collection. (SV)

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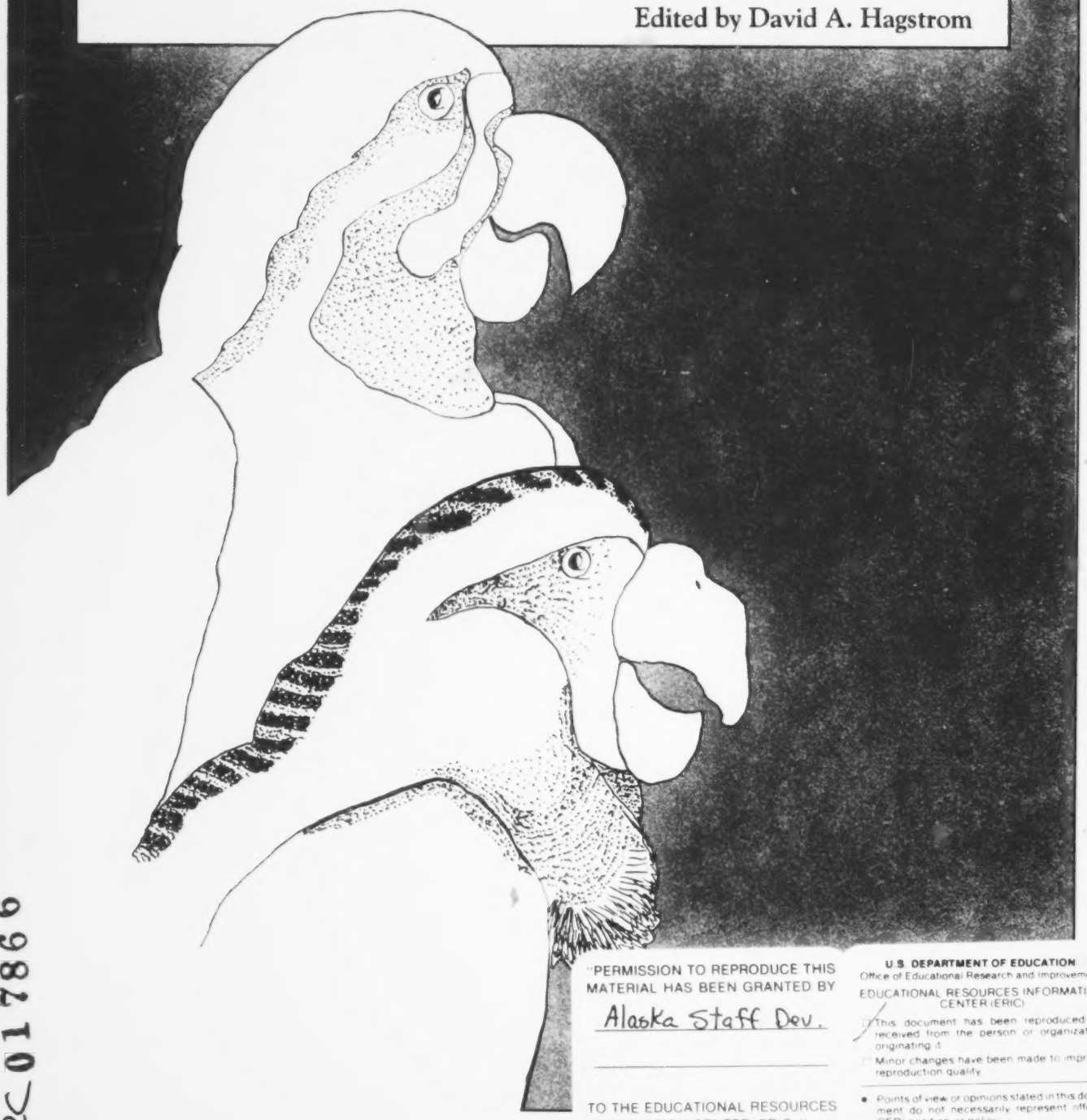
VIEWPOINTS

Reflections on the Principalship in Alaska

Edited by David A. Hagstrom



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May 1990

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INTRODUCTION

Principals don't write. We are told that principals are too busy to write. Well, this effort which we've made to compile a little anthology of the writings of Alaskan principals is proof that **principals do write**. Even amid the many pressures of the work, Alaskan principals take time to share their feelings and opinions about the nature of the work and about schooling issues in Alaska.

At the encouragement of the Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau campuses of the University of Alaska, the Principal Associations of Alaska, and the Alaska State Department of Education, a small group of principals, retired principals, and principals-to-be decided that they would share, in writing, some of their thoughts about a principal's world of work. With financial assistance from a federally funded L.E.A.D. (Leadership in Educational Administration Development) grant, approximately 40 principals supported this publication effort. From many entries, we selected the following articles because we thought that, collectively, they would provide the reader with some beginning insights into the cares, concerns, and the issues that are important to principals.

What the reader will find here are descriptions of schools and programs, historical accounts of triumphs and turmoil, stories about the aches and agonies of entry level difficulties, and the written sharing of the joys that go with being a school principal in Alaska. We've thought that our audience would be our colleagues and principals-to-be. However, if our little anthology has fallen into your hands—no matter what your work or what your interests—we hope that you find our writing to be inviting and compelling. We hope that as a result of our sharing, you will want to either join us in our next writing endeavor or that you'll want to find out more about a principal's work in Alaska.

We call our collection *Viewpoints: Reflections on Schooling in Alaska.* This particular issue contains reflections on the principalship in Alaska. Next year we're planning to write again and will be deciding early in the school year whether our focus should be more on the work that principals have undertaken on the **issues of schooling** in Alaska. You, our readers, could help us if you will. If you have suggestions about the future direction of *Viewpoints*, please write to me at the address listed below. We'd like to hear your responses and comments. Perhaps we'll include a letters section in our next edition.

Thank you for being a part of our pioneering effort. We invite you to correspond with the individual writers and with me. An author writes to express, clarify, and learn. The process can be extended when readers take the time to reflect, react, and respond to the writers. Your comments are invited and would be welcomed. We send you our best wishes and our high hopes for ever improving schooling for all of Alaska's children.

Sincerely,

David A. Hagstrom
Viewpoints Editor
College Station Box 8-3434
Fairbanks, Alaska 99708

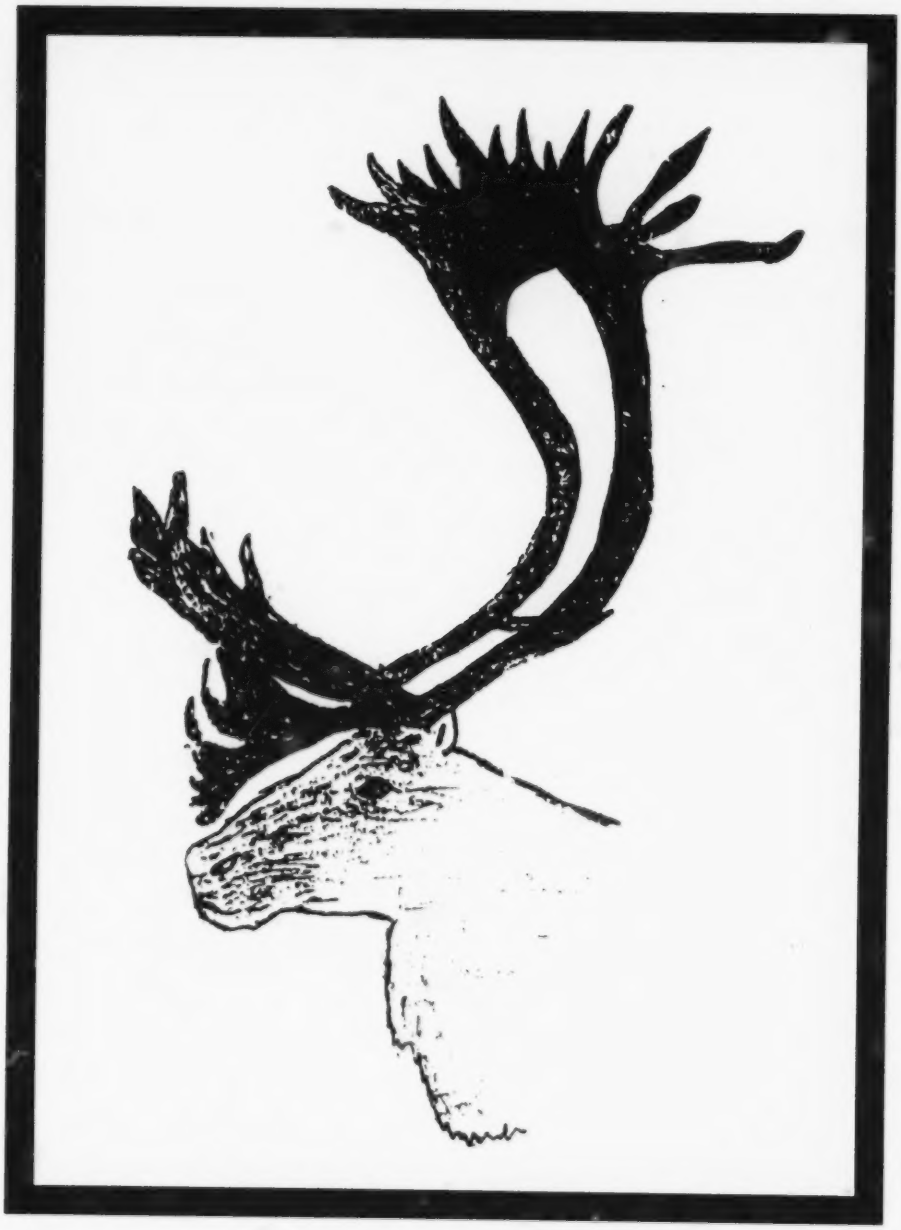
A Note On Organization

This anthology is divided into parts one and two. Part One includes the current written work of 23 principals, retired principals, and principals-to-be from across the state of Alaska. The writings selected for inclusion were chosen because they contributed to an overall composite portrait of the principalship in Alaska.

Part Two includes the writings of nine past and present principals and assistant principals from across Alaska. These nine writings were chosen by the editor and Larry Graham, Executive Director of Alaska's Association of Secondary School Principals. These writings were selected from *Totem Tales*, the association's newsletter, and were chosen because of their power to, once again, add to the composite picture of the principalship in Alaska. The location noted beneath the writer's name designates where the person lived at the time of the writing which, of course, is not necessarily where the person lives at this time.

VIEWPOINTS

PART ONE



I Still Think Of Myself As A Teacher

Sara Hornberger

Sometimes I feel like a fossil! With almost 27 years in education in Alaska behind me, I certainly rank as an old-timer. Educators who started long after I did are retired to golf courses in Arizona and beaches in Hawaii and here I am still teaching. Correction! I am a principal and have been for several years, but I still teach some classes and tend to think of myself as a teacher.

In the fifties when I was an undergraduate, it was rare to find a woman school administrator—at least in my part of the country. The thought of being a principal never occurred to me; women became teachers and teacher is what I would be. It was, thus, with some surprise that I found myself in 1963 serving as principal and high-school teacher in the Naknek School in newly organized Bristol Bay Borough. (Since I did not have an administrative degree or certificate, I can only assume the State, at the time, was lax in the matter of administrative certification in the rural schools.)

How did I do in my new position? The paperwork I could handle, but the rest of the job was difficult. With a full-time teaching schedule and three young children to care for, I had little time to read up on administration and where would I have found the literature? A review of my experiences with the principals under whom I had taught during the previous six years was of no help. The borough superintendent of schools was no assistance; he gave the job to me because he didn't want to be bothered with it. As a result, I blundered along, learning a lot and acquiring not a few mental and emotional bruises and bloody noses along the way.

One aspect of administration that has not changed over the years for the better is the amount of paperwork a principal has. There was plenty back then, there is too much more today. Teacher evaluations years ago were certainly easier and less time consuming than they are now, confined as they were to a check list that seemed to place most value on personal appearance, voice, the bulletin boards in the room, and how well behaved the students were during the administrator's brief visit to the classroom. As a whole, the students in Naknek were very well behaved, and I did not have a great many discipline problems to handle. Looking back, it seems to me that my major and most difficult task was dealing with the adults in the system—the teachers, the custodian, and the superintendent.

In March, 1964, the school superintendent resigned and the school board asked if I would serve as interim superintendent. Serving as a prime example of "out of the frying pan into the fire," I agreed. My brief experience as school superintendent was made most memorable because the former superintendent had also been the borough manager and for six months I shared an office with Jay Hammond who was the interim borough manager and who some years later was Alaska's governor for eight years.

The summer of 1964 while Jay and I were working together, I acquired a permanent immunity to mosquito bites. It happened like this. The Borough Assembly and the school board had decided to build a new school in South Naknek. Jay and I flew to King Salmon in his plane to meet Wally Wallenstein, the architect. From King Salmon, the three of us flew to South Naknek to inspect the building site. Fresh from the Lower 48, I wore a dress, nylons, and heels! How I cursed those shoes as I trudged from the Alaska Packer's airstrip in South Naknek to the school site and back. It must have been a distance of several miles and felt like 20. I ruined the shoes. Wally and Jay were gentlemen enough to refrain from any comments on my misery. Thank God there were no "white sox" or "no-see-ums" out that day to bite me, for when I got home that evening, there was not a spot on my legs that the mosquitoes had missed. To this day, a mosquito cannot raise a bump on me!

The first few years of existence of the Bristol Bay Borough was a time of turmoil that included a great amount of conflict between the Assembly and the school board. In retrospect, it appears to have been a matter of getting their respective roles sorted out and coming to agreement on common goals. As I recall, the school budget for 1963–1964 (funded by the State) was around $98,000, rather "bare-bones" for the support of two K–8 schools in King Salmon and South Naknek and one K–12 school in Naknek. When in the spring of 1964 the teachers respectfully requested a small increase in salary, which was approved by the school board, and which, in addition to some other unavoidable extra expenses, raised the proposed school budget for 1964–1965 to a bit over $100,000, the Assembly voted to cut the school budget to an amount below the 1963–1964 budget total.

I knew nothing about writing school district budgets and the board members knew even less. However, we had a manual from the State Department of Education which was a great help. Unfortunately, it contained no information on how to stretch money. I struggled with the figures trying to discover how to meet all expenses with the allocated funds until I finally gave up and admitted there just wasn't enough money. A call for help to the DOE offices in Anchorage brought a representative of their office out on the next plane. He looked over my work and told me what I already knew, that there was not enough money to cover our expenses. With his help, a new and adequate budget was

worked out and the assembly informed that it must provide reasonable funding for operation of the borough schools. No, the teachers did not get their raise that year.

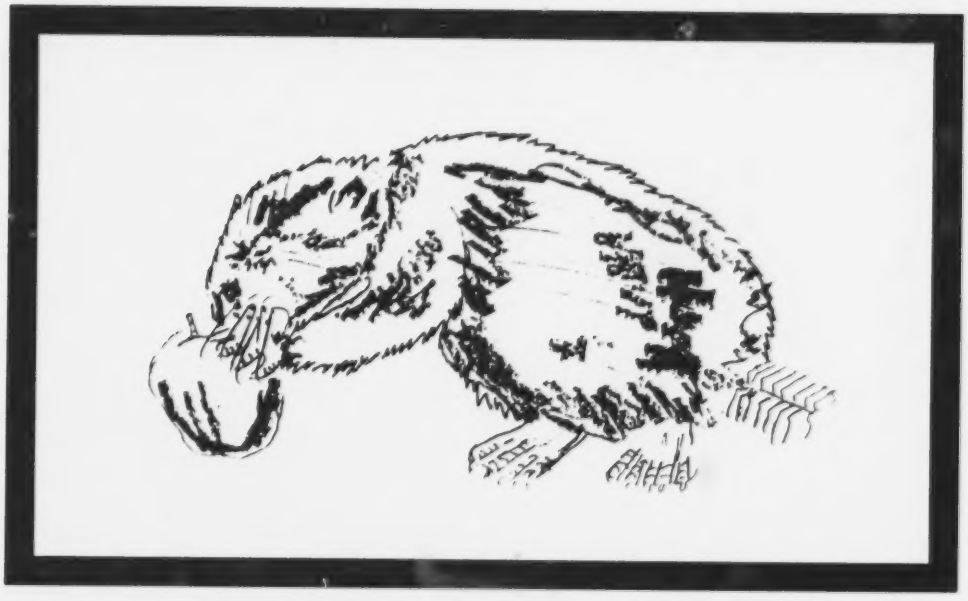
Around the middle of August, Elmer C. "Chuck" Smith arrived and took over as superintendent. I served as principal one more year. I was with Bristol Bay Borough schools for nine more years as teacher and the last three as elementary supervisor.

In 1974, our family moved from Naknek to a lodge on Lake Clark and I thought that, apart from teaching correspondence courses to my children, I was done with education. However, in February, 1976, I was elected to the board of newly organized Rural Education Attendance Area #7, Lake and Peninsula School District. That was the beginning of 11 professionally very rewarding years working to build a new and quality rural school district. During my years on the Lake and Peninsula board, our district built nine new schools, remodeled others, and constructed teacher housing. More importantly, we worked with the professional staff to build a quality educational program for our children. The work was always challenging and growth producing for me.

Despite my pleasure in the work of the school board, there came a time when I knew I should move on to something else. Not only should others have the opportunity to serve on the board, but I knew I was ready for something new in my life. In August of 1986, I enrolled in the graduate program at University of Alaska Anchorage and completed my master's degree in educational administration. In May 1987, I resigned from the Lake and Peninsula school board and in July signed a contract with the district to serve as a principal. And that is what I have been doing for the past two and a half years—two years in Chignik Lake and now in Levelock.

It is exciting and challenging to be principal of a rural school in Alaska today. Education has changed—improved, I believe. Clinical supervision has changed the whole concept of teacher evaluation making it a positive, cooperative, collegial, growth process. Recent research into how people learn and how the brain works gives us new insight in working with our students and has resulted in new, exciting, and challenging teaching methods. Computers, videos, and television are adding new dimensions to the classroom experience.

I am very glad that I made the decision to return to school for a few more years before joining the ranks of the retired.



Guidelines For Principals

Syd Wright
Petersburg, Alaska

When I arrived in Alaska as the first superintendent at Hoonah I was also the youngest superintendent of the then 17 in the state. I had also gone from full-time teacher in Wisconsin to full-time superintendent, thus skipping the normal interim role of principal. That was 27 years ago and I have spent 13 of the more recent years as principal of Petersburg High School and Middle School. David Hagstrom, in his letter inviting me to write for this collection of writings, used the words "craft knowledge." I am reminded of the famous *Everything You Need To Know You Learned In Kindergarten*. Surely what basics I know about being a successful principal are common knowledge to everyone—but maybe to the newcomer they aren't—at least they weren't mentioned in my graduate-school training. So, I've developed my own list of basic guidelines for principals. These are not in order of importance. Well, maybe they are. They are things to do in your first job and in every one thereafter.

1. **Find the custodian**. If he's like my first one, it would be a good idea to give him coffee and a little time to sober up. When that is more or less accomplished let him know that he is an extremely important person and during the getting-to-know-you time convey the extreme appreciation you have for the presence of toilet paper in each stall!

2. **Find and review each teacher's professional file**. Note any special strengths, academic or extracurricular. Compare these paper strengths with existing assignments. Note any evaluations done by the preceding administrators. Pay particular attention to any improvement plans. There were none in my first school—well, there were no evaluations at all except an occasional one from an earlier school. Be sure you leave complete and honest ones for the next person. You can take a short cut to teachers' support by being aware of their strengths and showing that personal interest when you have that first cup of coffee with them. Needless to say for new teachers, your home is their home until housing is found.

As the first area superintendent for Copper River in 1966, I requested a personal review of the professional files of all the teachers in the Copper River Basin from the

State Operated Schools (S.O.S.) headquarters in Juneau. I was at first refused this privilege. Upon my insistence I was finally given the stack. After a couple of hours perusal, the reasons for secrecy were apparent.

Let's interject here a little history before it's lost forever. Until 1966 the approximately 100 State schools, including military and excluding Bureau of Indian Affairs and district schools, were directly administered by two persons: Henry Gilbertson and Lee Hayes under the direction of Winifred Lande. That meant that they were responsible for hiring and firing of all teachers from Annette Island to Adak to Bethel to Eagle and all points in between. It meant that practically speaking, it was impossible for many teachers to ever personally see their supervisor on site for as long as 10 years. It meant that they were essentially unsupervised, at least as we presently understand the term. It inevitably meant that some, fortunately a small percentage, of ne'er-do-wells, social misfits, and criminals found their way into the system and remained there. The philosophy that finally developed to deal with the ensuing problems was involuntary transfer to an area where supervision was possible. Hence area superintendents were created and a disproportionate number of problem teachers were located near the offices of the new superintendents. (In my case "office" meant the bare classroom of an earthquake condemned school, sans desk, chair, file, or lamp).

3. **Let 'em fail kindergarten!** Now that statement needs some development. I had the great good luck to supervise a truly outstanding kindergarten teacher, Joan Baller, in 1964 in Hoonah. That year we had Hoonah's first graduating class, first headstart program, and first kindergarten. I was able to get the kindergarten teacher and other teachers and parents interested in early childhood education. From those dialogues and from those parents who would pull any string to get their kids enrolled in school too early, I came to the realization that maturity is a highly variable commodity and that, when in doubt, it was decidedly better to guide some parents into allowing their slightly immature children to repeat kindergarten. So much better to fail there than later in the fourth or eighth grade. How many youngsters have headed down the failure trail just because they were too young and too much was expected too soon?

4. **Master the budget.** Don't just master the budget but use it, change it, and increase it where it will benefit kids. Every school I've administered has doubled its library budget in two years.

Let me give you a war story. I came, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, from a midwestern college city to the largest Tlingit village in the world. To say that we were

unprepared for each other is a gross understatement. I came with a solidly structured ingrained idea that, through taxes, local folks should pay for their local schools. This naive notion had been buttressed by midwest administrators, boards, and graduate school courses. Hoonah paid nothing. It was all state and P.L. 874 monies. Twenty-seven years later I know that that was not and is not a Hoonah syndrome: in varying degrees it's still the way much of Alaska does its educational business. Anyway back to the story. Secure in my knowledge of what was best for Hoonah and its school budget, I inserted $10,000 revenue for the fiscal 1964 proposed budget to come from the City of Hoonah.

It was presented to the board—sailed through, no problem—was accepted at the city council meeting with few if any questions. I tell you what, boys and girls, I cruised out of that meeting on a euphoric cloud! Hoonah, by God, was going to join the city and the school in September—or October—or November. At the December council meeting I reminded them of their legal responsibilities. They had forgotten they had signed the budget. No January payment. There were finally some questions then, but no more electricity payments were made for the rest of the year. We ended up deficit about $5,000 that year. And, can you top this, that method of school support in Hoonah went on for the next 20 years. The moral here is don't expect to change local customs abruptly.

5. **Get out and about**. My wife and I joined the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Alaska Native Sisterhood. Those meetings were then conducted in Tlingit. We learned some of the language. Our last child was born in Hoonah and delivered by a Native midwife. No, I'm not recommending that to you. We joined the largest choir in town. The local people, thanks to Sheldon Jackson, loved to sing and play instruments. We did the *Messiah* with most of the solos.

We worked on the Public Health Council and the Liquor Control Board. We sewed up split skulls. We brought Native artisans into the schools.

Four of our family were taken into the tribe at a potlatch and we were given Tlingit names. All this, of course, has to be adjusted to local conditions, but it pays off in knowing the parents in other than the school setting.

6. **Encourage professionalism by example**. Read a variety of professional journals. Copy the best articles and route them to the appropriate teacher. Be the first in the school in the morning and the last to leave at night. Avoid personal leave. Spend more time in the classrooms than the office.

7. **Get rid of irremediable incompetents**. There is no excuse for perpetuating on our children the 2–30 years of damage a truly bad teacher can do. There are very few of them. Of course, provide all possible help and direction first. But when all the observations and conferences are over there is only one more important responsibility than firing—and that's hiring.

The above philosophy has gotten me into a lot of trouble. In one instance three different weapons were taken from educators or citizens by the state troopers. I've been physically threatened by mail and in person. I've been sued for defamation of character and had to wait four years for it to be thrown out of court.

I would do it again given the same incompetents. I would just get legal advice earlier!

Obviously, all this common sense stuff is pointed to new administrators. It's probably superfluous advice for most readers. It's just how these reflective moments have struck me.

One final thought and the part that I would go back and change if I could! **Don't let the school's eternal time demands steal from the needs of your own family.**

What's It Really Like? A Letter on Being a Rural Alaska Principal

Michael G. Walker
Thorne Bay, Alaska

Editorial Comment: This is the actual letter Mike Walker wrote to his brother-in-law about life as a rural principal. We thought it was such a good description that we decided to share it with our readers.

Dear Don,

After our telephone discussion the other night, I want you to know that I'm greatly honored and somewhat bewildered that my brother-in-law is entertaining the thought of becoming a principal. I am honored that you would consider a career in what I feel is the most challenging and rewarding profession in education. As my wife and a teacher who has never been able to fully understand my attraction to the principalship, Dee has some reservations. In my tired, stressed-out moments, I am bewildered that anyone would want to be or continue being a rural principal, knowing what, in fact, is involved. That brings us to the point of your question: "What's it's **really** like being a principal in a small rural school?"

As a backdrop to our discussion, you need to understand what a "small rural school" is, at least as the definition springs from my experience. Over the past 12 years, I've been a principal, a principal/counselor, and a principal/teacher in two schools in two southeast Alaska districts. One is a city district school on a single site. The other is the largest of 18 small schools in widely spread communities within a unified school district. Both of my principal experiences have been in K–12 schools with between 49 and 153 students and 6 to 11 teachers.

Although both schools are located on the same island and both are approximately the same population, the communities' demographics, economic bases, and personalities are very different. When Dee and I were there, the first community was a southeast Alaska Indian fishing village with a dominantly Native population whose families had lived there for generations. Everyone was related to everyone else. The long-term residents lived there because it was home to their families, and few thought seriously of

any future that involved living outside that community. The second community had a shorter history. It originated in the early '60s as a logging camp and became a second-class city in the early '80s. Men came there to work in the woods, bringing their families as housing became available, and they left when the work was finished. The logging camp became a small and increasingly diversified community of dominantly white loggers, forest service workers, and homesteaders. Surprisingly, even today, many residents of 20 or more plus years still regard someplace south as home, although some like us are growing roots. As you might expect, the divergent personalities of these two communities demand different sensitivities and skills from their schools' principals. Certainly, while many of my experiences as principal could have occurred in almost any school setting, some of my anecdotes are colored by local character.

I first became principal quite by tragic accident when my superintendent and his wife were killed in a seaplane crash in the fog while they were returning from a Thanksgiving visit with family. In this situation born of urgency, the principal was promoted to superintendent and I assumed the principal's duties. I had the cart before the horse: I was a working principal (still teaching full-time) and studying toward my degree in school administration and a principal's certificate.

Sometime during that difficult first year and after considerable deliberation, I decided that I **wanted** to be a principal. True, I enjoyed teaching and felt confirmed in my own strength as a teacher. But I saw the principalship as a means by which I could more widely promote quality education for kids by supporting the work of outstanding teachers and shoveling away the administrative bullshit and shoddy teaching practices that obstruct excellence in many schools. I am committed to that same mission today, although my youthful zeal has been tempered by experience.

Principals of small rural schools are different from our urban counterparts because we must personally be responsible to accomplish a wider scope of tasks for lack of specialized support staff. I personally feel I fit the role because I've always regarded myself as a jack of all trades, a kind of Renaissance person. In my school there is no assistant principal to handle student discipline or counseling. My secretary performs the multiple functions of receptionist, attendance clerk, financial bookkeeper, mail and freight distributor, student records clerk, payroll clerk, and inventory controller: she struggles to find time to assist with clerical tasks that I generate. My maintenance man is only in our school half-time as he also serves many other far-flung schools in our district. In most years, as humorous as it might seem to you, this characteristically unjocky principal has even been the athletic director. The principal, like every other staff member in a small school, must pitch in to make the activities program run. I sponsor Student

Council and the district Academic Decathlon team, chaperon dances, organize fund-raisers, run the score clock at basketball games, etc. The rural principal can't afford to be limited in talent or skill.

The last 12 years have proven to me that the rural principal has to be vigilant in order to avoid being distracted by constant demands that have little or nothing to do with the mission of quality education. It is difficult to maintain priorities clearly when bombarded by a hail of questions, demands, requests for approval, conferences, needs, scheduling events, proposals, student transportation concerns, messages, phone calls, paperwork, reports, surveys, maintenance requests, committees, meetings, rescheduling events, broken down equipment, personal traumas, meeting the district airplane, fire drills, fights on the playground, complaints, discipline referrals, re-rescheduling events, interesting stories, and jokes. All of these are characterized by the interrupting as emergencies and none of them can wait a few seconds until the principal has put some closure on the immediately preceding rush item. Usually, such vital interruptions are introduced by the words, "This will only take a minute," which it doesn't, or "I know you're busy but..." which imply that the interrupter wouldn't mind someone interrupting him or her, which also is not true. It's this constant flurry of demands from all quadrants that tends to make a large portion of the principal's time reactive. It's sometimes difficult to achieve a feeling of accomplishment when there is pressure from all directions to address a new question before I've reached closure on the preceding task. Often, it's necessary to juggle a half-dozen or more jobs at once. It seems I'm constantly double-clutching to shift mental gears, changing rapidly from one subject to the next...

The tardy bell has rung and the social studies teacher's sub hasn't yet arrived to cover his class. The district airplane will arrive at the dock in 10 minutes to pick up the maintenance man, and he's away from a phone thawing water pipes in one of the teacher housing units. The superintendent just called and he wants me to call him back right away. A new family wants to enroll their three elementary children. The district office purchasing agent is on the phone and has a question about the items on a purchase order. The custodian needs to order a new snow shovel and 200 pounds of rock salt. An elementary classroom aide reports that the photocopier is jammed. The special education teacher says that her classroom is cold. The Student Council senior class representative wants to know why Walkmans are not permitted in class. The librarian wants to discuss a new program to promote reading. The shop teacher says that a student has informed him that she is addicted to inhalants and wants help to quit. The basketball coach requests five more prints of the varsity teams for publicity uses. The third- and fourth-grade teacher says she needs desks to accommodate the new students who just enrolled. The Japanese

foreign language teacher needs student papers faxed to the satellite program teacher right away. A junior requests a schedule change. A mother says that she has heard that her high-school daughter and her boyfriend have been "groping" in the halls between classes, and she demands that something be done about it. My secretary notifies me that a sophomore didn't show for detention last night and he was unexcusably tardy again this morning. The playground supervisor just brought in a second grader with a skinned knee and she can't find the hydrogen peroxide. A parent calls from down south to request a waiver of the 20-absence policy for his daughters. The roads are dangerously slick for transporting the basketball teams, so we'll have to reschedule a new competition date with the other school. The science teacher reports that the nine o'clock bell doesn't ring in his room; could I please check it out? A booster mother wants to know if it's okay to schedule a fund-raiser hot lunch for Friday the twenty-second. The superintendent called again and he really needs me to return his call right away. The telephone man just arrived to hook up the private line in my office and telephone service will be down for "a few minutes." The basketball coach wants to play some northern schools; can we afford a trip to Sitka? A mother just backed her car into an illegally parked car and wonders what we're going to do about inadequate parking and a congested parking lot. The English teacher wants to order $500 worth of new literature books; can our instructional budget afford it? The female speech aide just reported singing and computer game noises coming from the boys' bathroom; would I check it out? A parent objects to his child's participation in the personal safety program because he feels various aspects of the program violate the child's innocence. The secretary reminds me that I've got to finish my important parent letter right away or she won't be able to get it photocopied and distributed to students before the kindergarten kids leave for the morning. The fifth- and sixth-grade teacher needs a new gym key because her aide accidentally twisted off the key in the lock. The black bears are raiding the trash dumpster again and leaving garbage strewn all over the school grounds. The custodian reports that students have been pulling the plastic caps out of the metal legs on the chairs in the commons and flicking them at each other. The science teacher wants to know if I can program the intercom system not to play music in her room before school in the morning. The secretary informs me that for every second she keys the CB radio microphone to call the school bus boat, the clock on the Dukane unit advances one minute, thus goofing up all the period bells and throwing the classes into turmoil; what should we do? The computer class needs to use the modem and the satellite TV class needs to teleconference; who gets the open phone line? The island principals and athletic directors need to meet; when will I be available? Everyone who used the gym yesterday afternoon is complaining of sunburned skin in areas that

were not covered by their gym clothes; what's going on? The toilet just overflowed in the first- and second-grade restroom and we can't get ahold of a custodian. The district computer coordinator called for written recommendations about the direction we should be taking for hardware and software purchase and use. I tried to return the superintendent's call, but he is on another line. A sophomore wants to know if I will consent to chaperon her class's all-night dance this coming Saturday. The city's public works director just poked his head inside my door and said that if we can have all cars out of the parking lot in 10 minutes he'll plow the snow. I nearly faint from lack of oxygen in my latex George Bush mask while impersonating the President and presenting a Presidential Award for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Education to one of my teachers. Immediately after I have spoken at an awards assembly about the mission of education in America, my secretary informs me that it's 40 degrees in the music room. The maintenance man has flown out to another school, so I have to shovel snow and break ice away from the door so I can restart the music room furnace so that afternoon music classes can be held. The mother of the student who failed to show for detention last night is here; she says that our detention-for-tardy policy is stupid and she wants it changed. A freshman wants to know if we can open the student store during nutrition break. The kindergarten teacher reports that the writing on her chalkboard gradually and mysteriously disappears by itself as the morning wears on. My secretary reminds that I need to do a scheduled classroom observation in five minutes. A fax message comes through from the superintendent: "Get off the phone and call me back **now**." The next evening as my wife and I are seated at the head table for the Black and Gold Sports Banquet, I am suddenly and quite by surprise informed that I am the emcee, and I am due to open ceremonies in just five minutes.

Naturally, not all of these events occurred during the same morning, but they are all typical happenings in the normal, day-to-day life of a rural, small school principal.

Nearly every teacher on my faculty has said to me at least once in sincere expression and tone of voice, "I wouldn't want your job." Usually, that comment is motivated by their having observed me manage a conflict, handle a crisis, make a difficult decision, or simply deal with the abundance of mundane nonsense that seems to clutter a principal's instructional leadership role. Frankly, I, too, can do without the mundane nonsense. But ironically, the very same conflicts, crises, and decisions are the necessary challenges that—when handled successfully—make being a principal worthwhile.

More money is a pretty poor reason for striving to become a principal. It's true that principals generally make more money than teachers. But consider that a principal's contract is usually for 10 to 40 days longer that a teacher's contract, and that every

principal I know always works more days than contracted. Consider, too, the impact that long hours, high stress, and numerous off-hour demands have on marital and family relationships. Past a certain number of hours per week, additional money loses its value. Being a principal, especially a principal of a small rural school, is not something one does only for a paycheck.

I continue to choose to be a principal because I believe that I can help many young people to learn and grow through the work I do with their teachers. I'm not perfect and neither is my job; but I enjoy most of what I do and I think that I'm a good principal. I enjoy helping teachers to do their jobs better. I like structuring new and expanded opportunities that help kids to grow and learn. I feel good when I've been able to help a new teacher improve her classroom management skills. It gives me a special kind of high when I've been able to work with a veteran teacher to refine a teaching practice that causes kids to learn more effectively. I gain new energy from the young adult who used to be a constant discipline problem when he returns to tell me, "You weren't really the jerk I thought you were when I was in high school. You knew what you were doing. Thanks for helping me grow up, Mr. Walker." The ultimate principal's high comes to me when I tour my school and realize that kids in every classroom are receiving the benefit of quality instruction from the masterful and caring teachers whom I have selected and continue to support.

I hope that my description of the less appealing aspects of the life of a rural principal in a small school hasn't diminished your aspirations. The day-to-day realities of being a principal often stack up as increasing pressures. But as one of my teachers who had just handed me a particularly difficult problem to wrestle once conjectured half jokingly, "I guess that's why they pay you that big salary." Just keep in mind that despite all the other "stuff" that runs interference with your higher priorities, the principal really does an extremely important job.

Good luck with your decision!
Mike

Contrasts Between Large and Small Schools

Fredi Buffmire
Fairbanks, Alaska

In this, my ninth year as a principal, I feel fortunate to reflect on eight years as the principal of a small school (250 students) and to anticipate a future as principal of a 600 student school. The contrasts and similarities have been part of that enjoyable challenge that permeates the work of principaling

The contrasts between large and small are more than size and pace. The beginnings of a school seem to be a marked feature in its development as a microculture. My first school began 30 years ago as a junior/senior high school on a military base—first under the Department of Defense, then State Operated Schools, and finally as part of the local district. Its teachers and leadership had experienced many bureaucratic shifts and much excuse making. The distance from any central office and a convoluted responsibility for repair and maintenance seemed to breed a mixture of self-reliance and cynicism. The nature of the community itself reinforced the feeling that "this too shall pass." The housing of grades K–2, 3–4, and 5–6 in separate buildings intensified the tendency for restricted focus and short term perspective.

Attracting staff and encouraging professional growth is a constant challenge in an outlying, small school. The opportunities for maintaining an understanding of the overall elementary picture are limited. You wind up recruiting with fervor and then in three or four years encouraging good teachers to leave. Staff dynamics are in a constant state of flux. For a principal who enjoys personnel work and the orchestration of positive, interpersonal dynamics, it can be a heaven-sent experience.

Military communities are unique in their needs, outlook, and expectations. Each one has its own personality. There is an ostensible, quick adjustment to change. The settling-in, here-to-stay, where-to-go-next, short-timer cycle has special ramifications for kids and their attitudes toward school.

Pearl Creek, on the other hand, was designed, built, and staffed as a K–6 facility. Staff has been stable, is well educated in general, and has been protective of the institution for seven years. The staff lives in the community and works actively in the school's support. They chose to be here and will stake their profession on remaining. It is a situation for which each opening has enormous competition. Staffing is a question of

political, community, professional, and site-specific finesse. Applicants are numerous and the maintenance of the best possible configuration for students is a special challenge. The likelihood of a staff member choosing to transfer after coming is minimal. Recruiting and selection requires an entirely different and more sophisticated set of skills.

There are those elements of the job that seem similar. I felt only too pleased to discover that all the battles might not be new ones. The range of personal concerns remains somewhat similar. Those rites of passage (birth, illness, and death) that all of us encounter are present though the numbers vary. Each situation occurs dependent on the individual, their circumstances, professional strength, and personal stamina.

There are the rough spots—community upheaval, parent animosity, complex, bigger-than-life problems, and staff/student restlessness—the magnitude of the problem, number of vested interests, and sphere of influence fluctuate, but the skills required have common threads. Patience, willingness to listen, willingness to communicate giving the problem time, and having some sense of perspective (e.g., what will this mean five years from now?) seem to be skills (ever-in-the-acquisition stage) that are required daily.

Staff, at large and individually, have the same needs to continue to grow professionally. The principal must be an ongoing force in motivating, providing for, and modeling instructional change.

The need for support, encouragement, and basic belief in professional staff seems to be recognized, appreciated, and validated. Empowerment exists within us, each and everyone—teacher and administrator, big school or small.

Bush Principal: Man of Many Hats

John A. Rusyniak
Mentasta, Alaska

Life in Bush Alaska moves at a different pace than urban areas. People must learn to be patient and to do without things that most others take for granted or run down to the local merchant to pick up or expect the local utility to provide. So, too, are small Alaskan Bush schools different. All of the small schools I've worked in have been self-contained units, providing their own electricity and other utilities. The schools are K–12 with anywhere from 12–40 students.

A principal in Bush Alaska, in order to survive, is a person who must be a jack of many trades and even master of some. For the past 10 years I have served as the principal/teacher of several small schools in the Interior of Alaska. It has been a truly stimulating and challenging time, both personally and professionally. I would like to share with you several of my experiences and duties, some assigned, some assumed.

Principal as Maintenance Personnel

There have been countless occasions when I have had to assume the responsibility for the maintenance person who might have been out of town or out on a binge. One particular winter we had a stretch of cold of -65 to -70 degrees that lasted for three weeks. During that time, our water tanks went dry and it was absurd to pump water from our river supply. Our fire hose and pumps would freeze quickly along the quarter-mile stretch as we would roll them out. Finally on New Year's Eve it warmed up over 100 degrees, to 35 degrees. I tried for hours to get some help—the normal maintenance man had left the village for the holidays and no one else was interested in working on the holiday. Not knowing how long the warmer weather would last, I decided to tackle the job myself. I spent the next 12 hours rolling and unrolling fire hose, gasing up pumps, priming pumps, then draining and hauling pumps back to their cozy storage sites.

During my first winter in Alaska, I received a letter from the superintendent, a man I only met once before, which said that as principal I needed to require my teaching staff to perform 50 percent of all normal cleaning of the school. I discussed this with the only other teacher at our school, and we wondered what he had in mind, whether we were expected to do half of the job every day, all of the job every other day, half of every

room, or some other bizarre arrangement. It ended up in such confusion and resistance in the 11 schools around the district that it never did take place.

Then there was the time when the maintenance person was out of the village again and the school boilers were just about out of fuel. With only a handful of people who can do certain types of work in a village, you don't always find someone to do the job you need done. I ended up pumping fuel oil from the 5,000 gallon storage tanks, to make sure the building didn't freeze.

The other big maintenance concern that I've experienced frequently over the past 10 years are "down" generators. Since there aren't any other sources of power in many Bush sites, this becomes a major concern. It's not too bad during the day when you are trying to teach or solve some other problems because you have some daylight (which varies greatly depending on the time of year), many people are aware of the problem, and you have many runners to go get help (until recently phones weren't something we even had at schools let alone individuals' homes). But when the generators went out in the middle of the night, you would be awakened by the sudden dead silence. It was a challenge. I don't think they ever went out when it was warm or the days were long and sunny; it was always when it was really cold. As I would grope around looking for something to wear before I went on my search for help, I wondered who might answer that knocking at their door at three in the morning? It wouldn't be long before water lines would begin to freeze. Hours later things would be jerry-rigged until a new part could be flown in or sabotaged off another system. Electrified again!

Of course, Bush principals have to take care of the normal every day maintenance items that I imagine every other principal does like unclogging plugged toilets, cleaning up after sick kids, adjusting student desks, resurfacing chalkboards, etc.

Principal as Nurse

Children in a small school have just as many runny noses, scrapes and bruises, headaches, upset stomach, and other ailments as any other school. But in Bush Alaska there's no school nurse to send them to. Many a times I've had kids stretched out in my office on a makeshift bed, until the bus could take them home or parents would come in to check the mail.

I've had parents get after me for not sending other children who were sick home, but when they send their sick kids in they don't want me messing with what they do. It's the parents choice!

Fortunately, many villages have very reliable health aides you can count on. They normally have daily phone conversations with doctors to help them with most situations.

Principal as Counselor

Once students leave the village high schools they are expected to have had all of the proper forms completed for college: financial aid, applications for housing, scholarship applications—you name it—filled out and completed. Well, in the small schools, that responsibility falls on the principal. Occasionally you'll run into a district which has reliable counselors who will travel to all the schools and take care of this part of your job.

Long before that though, you have to make sure that you and those before you have kept accurate records on what the students have taken and still need, which isn't always as easy as it may sound. Because of a high turnover of certificated staff in many Bush sites, there is often no one around with whom to double-check or discuss a student's records or credits other than the students themselves.

Principal as Business Manager

It's normal for a principal to keep track of budgets, sign off purchase requests, and juggle line items, but many times I've been at the front lines raising funds for the upcoming trips. The greatest of those fund-raisers was not too long ago when, with the help of 24 students, K–12, a community of 120, and staff of two together raised $12,000 in two months so we could make our bus trip to Calgary for the 1988 Winter Olympics.

Principal as Travel Agent

My experience with small schools has included school trips, usually every spring. Frequently these trips include a great deal of fund-raising, and they always demand coordination for accommodations, meals, travel, and learning situations.

One of my greatest efforts in this area was the 10-day bus trip to Calgary, Alberta, with 26 kids and 10 adults **on a school bus**. The other was a week-long trip to Los Angeles, California, with 10 Native students, who were performing their traditional dances for different groups in the Los Angeles area. I would definitely recommend flying any day!

Principal as Bus Driver

It isn't always easy to find a person legally qualified to drive a school bus in a small village—who would think it would matter anyway! Well, I decided one year that it was time for me to become a certified driver. Maybe that was a mistake as I look back on it now.

One winter my regular driver slipped and fell unlocking the door into the garage and for the next two weeks I would get to work early enough to get some things done, leave about seven A.M. to make the bus run, teach and principal, take the kids home, then come back and try to tie up all of the loose ends. Unfortunately, I was the only qualified driver for 150 miles!

Principal as Coach

A mechanic I'm not, but more mornings than I care to remember I've had my bus driver come into the office telling me she had a flat tire and if I didn't want the kids waiting too long in the cold—perchance I could come out and help her change it? I suppose that isn't as bad as getting up in the middle of the night to work on boilers that won't fire or bleed fuel lines that are restricting the flow of fuel to the hot water heater (which I've had to do rather often).

Principal as Health Inspector

A hot lunch program adds a new dimension of responsibility to the small schools, even though it is very important to the students of the village. It's been my experience that many of the best cooks in the village haven't completed school; and, therefore, have trouble reading labels and completing the required paperwork associated with the program. Guess who either gets to do it or cancels the program? I can remember years ago having students cutting pictures of foods, from old magazines, to put on our food storage shelves, since USDA foods generally have generic type labels. Finally during the last two years I've had the good fortune to have a qualified secretary who handles most of that paperwork.

Principal as Secretary

Most of my time in the Bush I have been responsible for all of my own secretarial services, which wouldn't be too bad if I was only a principal, but having the full responsibilities of a classroom teacher as well really cuts into my day. After eight years of doing most of this by myself with the exception of whatever volunteer help I could get from my wife or others, it's really a blessing now to have a regular, competent secretary. Using a computer has really made me more efficient when I have to function in this capacity.

Principal as EMT

The only medical service we have had in any of the villages I've ever worked in are village health aides. There have been many occasions where my vehicle has been the only one running. Once I was asked to rush to the airstrip with my snowmachine to provide lights for the medevac taking out a man who had a stick in his eye. One Halloween night I was asked to rush a man 50 miles to a larger clinic when he chopped his fingers off while splitting wood. Fortunately, both men ultimately were okay.

Principal as Flight Service Contact

Airports (as they are called in many Bush villages) aren't any more than a backyard landing strip. Many times the pilots who carry in the mail, freight, and passengers need a weather report:... how high is the ceiling?... can you see the mountains or not?... has the runway been plowed this week?

Often, everyone in the village runs out to greet the plane as it taxis up the runway—to see who is coming in or going out. When there is a load of school freight to be hauled, people scatter very quickly. Guess who gets called?

I remember one winter, we were running out of #1 fuel oil to heat the school and generate electricity. There were no roads to most of the villages and it would be months before breakup when the barge could come back with more fuel. Daylight was minimal and the pilots who hauled the fuel in, in Cessna 207s with huge bladder. asked if I could make sure the smudge pots stayed lit (that was before many of the runways had any electricity or lights).

Is this the picture of a nine to five principal? In Bush Alaska there's no such thing! But I find the work to be stimulating, rewarding, and satisfying. Perhaps I'd have it no other way.

Think Small, Alaska!

Pat Evenson-Brady
Fairbanks, Alaska

I initially wrote this article in the summer of 1985, after five years as the principal of Russian Mission Schools. Portions of the article were quoted in Teacher as Inventor, by Kleinfeld, MacDiarmid, and Parrett. Currently, I'm a principal in Fairbanks, so I've been lucky enough to experience both urban and rural Alaska. In 1985, I wrote:

Those of us who work in the Bush are frequently dismayed when we discover what nonrural Alaskans think about rural schools. Stories circulate of students who receive A grades in high school for fifth-grade work, of teachers who secretly believe that Native students cannot be expected to perform well, and of students who then live up to their teachers' low expectations for them. We also hear of villages where alcohol-released violence and despair paralyze the school's attempts to educate students and of the crazies, zanies, carpet-baggers, and white-collar-quasi-criminals who migrate to those situations where controls are loose and where sometimes too much money has chased too few sound educational plans.

And we Bush educators may well be the guilty parties who perpetuate these stereotypes. When we meet in professional company, we love to entertain folks with our lurid accounts of the exigencies of our professional lives. Yes, it is true that we sometimes spend inordinate amounts of time fussing over broken generators, frozen pipes, delayed airplanes, and a host of other problems that seem only minimally related to students and learning. And the best of us can keep audiences entertained for hours with tales of how we cope with our disaster-a-day lives. They're funny; they're bizarre; and our audiences all find our performances ever too quaint and deliciously exciting.

But, our stories don't represent the reality of rural Alaska education today. They are the sauces and spices—not the entree. And if you think that you know about Bush schools today because you or your sister-in-law taught in Kwigillingok in 1973, you're still wrong. Changes and improvements have occurred rapidly in Bush districts, especially in the last five years.

The truth of the matter is that rural Alaskan districts are well on the way to educational excellence. There isn't a single innovative educational idea developed in the last 10 years that isn't currently in place in one or more Bush schools. Computers, the Alaska Writing Project, peer tutoring, direct instruction, Type B management, quality circles, mastery learning, curriculum alignment, simulations, student entrepreneurship, peer counseling, oral history, Foxfire projects, audioconferencing, whole language, Math Their Way—you name it and somebody is doing it in the Bush. Many rural schools currently are hotbeds of educational innovation because their unique configurations encourage teachers and administrators to seek out and implement new ideas, to experiment, to evaluate, to discard the unworkable, and to refine innovations to fit local needs. Rural schools pose interesting and demanding questions; the answers often exist on a manageable scale.

What are the ingredients of this special environment in rural schools that encourage innovation? Rural educators have many advantages over urban and semi-urban colleagues. First-and foremost, most rural schools have small numbers of students. Glass found that the quality of instruction began to improve significantly when class size dropped below 17 students and many rural teachers and principals work with classes this size and smaller. Multigrade classrooms may have students in two, three, four, or more grade levels, but the sheer numbers still favor rural schools. Small class size makes possible individualized tutorial approaches to instruction which are seldom possible in more crowded schools and classrooms.

And then, rural education is personal education. Because many of the amenities of urban life aren't available to distract teachers or students, personal interactions among students, school staff, and the school's community can operate to enhance learning in the best traditions of humanistic education. In and out of schools, teachers and students constantly explore the richest and best source of entertainment and enrichment: each other.

Another ingredient in the climate for excellence and innovation is that most rural educators work in settings which are culturally different from their own. This creates opportunities to be learners in the educator's daily life which helps to prevent intellectual stagnation. Rethinking one's cultural assumptions in a different setting can produce exciting curriculum—for both teachers and students.

I found being a rural principal very satisfying. When all of your professional attention revolves around 80 students, instead of 500 or 1,500, the quality of your involvement changes dramatically. I could see and reinforce the student's first tentative turning toward a positive behavior, or a love of Shakespeare, or a gift for leadership,

which I might have missed in the numbers game in larger schools. I could reinforce and nurture those responses personally. I watched the beginning teacher who I'd coached really click with a questioning technique that I modeled when I taught the class. Rural principals typically coach their teachers as well as their students. And I knew that I did make a difference for students because school is such a big part of the lives of rural students. Just as our students may have more positive self-concepts than their city cousins because they have a real, useful position in their families and villages, so we as educators can feel good about ourselves because of the significant roles we play in the lives of our villages and schools.

A keystone in any plan for educational excellence is recruiting and retaining superior teachers and administrators. Rural schools are attracting more and more teachers who have been successful in other settings and are now transfering their expertise to rural Alaska. The more trying aspects of Bush living, caused by remoteness, isolation, and cultural differences, seem to ensure that only school people who are flexible, innovative, and determined typically choose to stay in the Bush. This survival-of-the-fittest process quickly weeds out many of the uninspired putting-in-my-years-'til-retirement teachers and principals who clutter some districts. The Bush survivors make it, in part, because they are better at searching out and implementing the best educational practices for their settings. The increasing number of Native teachers and administrators in rural schools helps to bridge the cultural differences between schools and students, and provides excellent role models for the values of education.

Another major factor in the development of educational excellence is that rural Alaskan education is still imbued with a pervasive sense of the possible. It is possible to do many things and pretty quickly. The wheels of our bureaucracies are smaller and often turn faster than they might in larger places. Want to see how mastery learning works? Have at it! Always hankered to see if peer counseling could function in an alcohol prevention program? Go ahead—design the program! Almost anything that a teacher can sell to a principal and Advisory School Board can be implemented, at least locally, within a short time.

And how long has it taken to develop this climate for excellence? All of us, urban and ruralites alike, tend to forget that most high schools in the Bush are less than 15 years old. School boards, parents, students, communities, and administrators and teachers are just now getting high-school programs firmly in place, with a clear knowledge base for running these small schools effectively. Remember, we didn't have any good models to turn to. Rural educators had to invent the right wheel to run smoothly on the unique

terrain, and that process couldn't happen overnight. Rural schools surely have a long way to go—but look how far they've come!

Fifteen years ago, a rural Alaskan superintendent told me that **at least** his district had held school for 180 days in each site and that represented no mean accomplishment. Today, nobody would dare hold that up as a measure of a school district that was doing its job. Ten years ago, superintendents went Outside or recruited teachers over the telephone—warm bodies to plunk down in the villages with the hope that they could last until May, but also with the recognition that many would leave by Christmas. Today, many Bush districts have more applicants than they need and can select from a range of qualified candidates. In 1975, the average rural teacher stayed 1.7 years in the Bush; that average has increased in most Bush districts.

All of this is not to say that there are not major problems in rural schools. Some of the problems, such as the lack of viable economic bases in most communities and alcohol abuse, cannot be tackled by the school alone, but will require coordinated efforts by the schools, communities, Native corporations, and government. Other problems, such as lower student achievement test scores for Bush students than urban students, will not yield to a quick fix, but will require tenacious, long-term coordinated actions—a commitment difficult to achieve in the face of school board, teacher and administrator turnover, and budgetary fluctuations.

But it's too easy for Bush school problems and failures to capture all of the urban and legislative attention and for the many successes to be ignored. Some of the successes in general terms include more rural students graduating from high school than 15 years ago; more rural students going on to postsecondary education; fewer rural high-school dropouts than in urban areas. Most individual schools have their own particular success stories, and these also speak to the impact of the continuing improvements in rural schools.

It is in the best interests of our state and its citizens that we recognize and continue to foster this powerful movement toward rural educational excellence. To facilitate this, I call on my colleagues in rural schools to stop spending all our air time telling those wonderfully funny Bush gothic tales and to start talking about the real positive successes in educating students that are happening in the Bush. People, rural schools are good! Let's spread the word! Bush is our location, not our league!

In 1985, a distinguished visitor from the Alaska Department of Education addressed a group of rural principals, talking to us about how we could compensate for the obvious disadvantages our rural students faced when their education was compared to urban Alaskans. We respectfully disagreed. Rural schools have numerous advantages as

well as disadvantages; so do urban schools. In our judgement, the call is not automatically in favor of an urban education. It's too bad that not every Alaska child can have the advantages of a both a rural and an urban education!

Building Caring Relationships

Jim Carden
Emmonak, Alaska

Emmonak is a village of approximately 700 Yupik Eskimos, and it is located near the mouth of the Yukon River. In August of 1976, the new high school opened in Emmonak. It was built as a result of the Molly Hootch decree whereby the State of Alaska agreed to build high schools in all of the rural villages that desired such a school and that had a minimum of eight students. Emmonak thus became one of the 11 villages in the newly established Lower Yukon School District.

As is the case in so many rural communities, the school in Emmonak is not under one roof. In fact, the elementary school consists of one main building which houses kindergarten, first, and second grades. Each of the other grades—third, fourth, fifth, and sixth, as well as the elementary special education—is housed in separate out buildings near the main elementary building. There are six separate buildings with classrooms at the elementary site. The high school is approximately a quarter-mile away from the elementary school, and the school was built for ninth though twelfth grades. Last year the seventh grade was moved into an outbuilding near the high school for its core subjects and used the high-school building for some elective courses. Emmonak thus has nine separate classroom buildings,.

I taught in Emmonak for nine years—1976–1985. During this time, the school had six principals: five of them stayed one year, and one principal stayed four years—1980–1984. Being somewhat confident that I could avoid some of the problems that the previous principals had and also wanting some stability in the principalship, I began my pursuit of a master's degree in school administration in 1982. I took Bush delivery courses from the University of Alaska Fairbanks during the school year, and attended classes on the campus for three summers. In 1985 I completed my program, received my Type A certification from the state, and in August was hired as principal of Emmonak Schools. I am presently on a year's leave of absence from the Lower Yukon School District and am a full-time student at University of Alaska Anchorage, working toward superintendent certification.

The intent of this paper is to describe from my experience what the life of a principal in a Bush setting is like. In attempting to complete this task, I caution the reader

to be aware of the fact that my experience is somewhat unique in that: 1) my wife and her family are from Emmonak, and 2) I served as principal in a school where I taught for nine years, and was therefore familiar with the students, parents, community, teachers, and staff. I was also familiar with the curriculum and both the real and perceived good and bad points about all of these.

During my studies, I was frequently questioned about the advisability of becoming a principal in the same school that I taught in for nine years. The implication was that familiarity with the system and staff might make it very difficult to do the job properly. On the contrary, knowing that I will be at a new school next fall, I see a lot of wisdom in the idea that a person "comes up through the ranks" within a particular school—as is done in many cases with central office position. By working in the school as a teacher, I learned the culture of the school. Through interaction with various individuals I formed my ideas about how the school should operate, what changes should be made, and what the vision for the school should be. I also knew right off that there were staff members, parents, and community members who did not particularly want me as principal. With this knowledge, over the summer after I was officially hired, I was able to make specific plans as to how I was going to handle various situations. I did not have to take a half to a full year to learn the setting and all the political aspects of the school. On the very first day of school, I was able to function as the principal.

As I explained earlier, Emmonak (like so many other K–12 schools) has a large number of outbuildings and quite a distance between the elementary and high-school buildings. How does a principal handle this? Two problems that I saw before I became principal were 1) with the principal's office in the high school and the principal seen rarely in the elementary, the elementary staff had felt neglected for years, and 2) the elementary teachers in particular felt isolated and out of touch with each other and worried about what to do in case of an emergency.

In the Bush we are already isolated by the lack of roads and reliable transportation; we are removed from family and friends and for many of us it is the first time we have ever lived in a situation where we are a minority. What can a principal do to help relieve that feeling of isolation and aloneness for his or her teachers? From the first day of my job as principal I let the elementary teachers know that I would be in their classrooms at least once a day. During the four years I was principal, I did miss on occasion, but I usually lived up to this promise—some days I would simply walk in one door and out the other, sometimes I would stop and help Johnny with a work sheet, sometimes I would interrupt the whole class and make an announcement and simply interact with them, and some days I would stop and chat with the teacher. Probably one of the most important

things I did was to respect and honor any invitation I received from a teacher or student to attend a special event in the classroom—be it during the school day or after hours. I do care about the teachers and students and what is going on in school on a daily basis, and this was and is a simple way of communicating my concern.

I frequently complained that all the other pressures put upon me did not allow me to be the "educational" leader that I want to be. Upon reflection, however, I now feel that by showing the practicing teachers who face the students day in and day out that I, the principal, cared enough for them to make that appearance each day and to respond to them whenever called upon. I did in fact affect and enhance the education of the children. If a teacher knows that the principal is aware of and appreciates what he or she is doing, that person becomes a better and more energetic teacher. I may not have great influence on curriculum, but I believe that this is just one way that I have indeed become an "educational leader."

Teachers are frequently faced with emergencies and being in outbuildings is very frustrating. What's to be done if you have to leave the building to take care of the problem? Fortunately my district cared enough about the children and the teachers that they let me spend a little money to install VHF radios in every outbuilding and my office. What a relief and positive caring message this sent to our teachers! The response and outcomes were so positive that I ensured that even the elementary classrooms in the main building and the elementary teacher's room had a radio. Each teacher was given a different channel to monitor and we agreed that the main intent of the radios was for emergencies and communications before and after class. Of course, as is usual, most abuse came from the office in the form of messages that somehow were deemed important enough to interrupt instruction!

I really feel that one of the biggest advantages of being a Bush teacher or administrator lies in the relationships one is able to build with the students, staff, and community. The schools were built to be a major, perhaps even central, focus of the community—to provide education for the students and to be an activity center for the community.

I believe that all principals have to respond in a caring manner to students, teachers, other staff members, parents, community leaders, and central office staff. In this way, a principal can really make a difference in rural Alaska.

Communication, Coffee, and Community Relations

Bruce Currie
St. Michael, Alaska

School leaders in any setting need to have the support of their local communities in order to be effective, but this support is even more imperative to an educational leader in a rural, Native village. Almost without exception, rural administrators come from outside the state of Alaska and have had limited experience with Native students. Another factor that some administrators have to adjust to is the size of the communities in which they are working. A very small community, whether it is a Native Alaska village or a remote mining community in Nevada, functions much differently than the larger towns and cities from which most of us come. The ideas to be discussed here will deal with using communication skills to maintain and improve community relations in a rural Alaska setting, but most would be equally as effective elsewhere.

My six years as an administrator in the Bering Strait School District have convinced me that there are three keys to maintaining or improving community-school relations. Other Bush administrators could certainly identify additional factors that enter into fostering positive community relationships, but these are the things I make a conscious effort to do on a regular basis. As a result, I have been able to avoid major conflicts that have the potential to make life difficult for rural administrators. The first key is to maintain positive student and staff morale in the school. The second key is to share decision-making authority when it is appropriate. Frequent, positive communications are the third, and probably the most important, element that enters into the relationship an administrator forms with the community in which he works.

In both of the villages where I have served as the principal, approximately one-third of the entire population of the village was in the school every day, either as students or as employees. That's a significant percentage of the total population of the village. These are also the people who will know the most about the day-to-day operations of the school; it would be a mistake to think that parents and other community members do not listen to (and usually believe) what they hear from students, even the youngest primary age children. This is not to imply that parents are wrong to believe what they hear from

students. The point is that as administrators we have the opportunity to see that students and the staff leave school feeling good about themselves and about what went on in school that day. Obviously, there are times when students must be disciplined and staff members must be reprimanded; but, if you accept the hypotheses, as I do, that happy people tend to be more productive, then keeping people happy is a vital part of an administrator's job. Visitors to the school will also notice the "good vibes" and almost always respond in a similar manner.

Saying school should be a happy, friendly place is fine, but making it happen takes a commitment from both the principal and the staff. One important aspect of maintaining good morale is avoiding the types of conflicts that have the potential to blow up into major problems. Our success in avoiding major conflicts between students and teachers or between individual students results partially from an agreement we reach with all seventh through twelfth-grade students on the first day of school. That understanding is that it is all right for students to admit, even if only to themselves, that they are too angry to deal with a situation at a given time. Under the terms of this agreement, it is acceptable for students to simply walk away from a teacher or anyone else and leave school, provided they adhere to three rules. The first is that their departure cannot be combined with an outburst of temper. The second is that they tell the principal, a teacher, or the school secretary that they are leaving the building so the parents can be notified. The final rule is that the student accepts the responsibility to go back later in the day or the next day, after calming down, to the teacher or the principal in order to deal with the problem that led to the conflict.

In all but a very few cases, the student has come back after school or before school the next morning, in a much calmer frame of mind and usually willing to admit the he or she was at fault. The student still receives the appropriate discipline for the original infraction, but there is no punishment for leaving school. Also, the additional problems that would have occurred had the teacher insisted on dealing with the problem when the student was too angry or upset to respond rationally have been avoided. This allows students to save face in front of their peers; it also permits them to take some initiative in dealing with the problem rather than forcing them to respond to the words and actions of the teacher or principal. We frequently tell high-school students that it is time for them to start acting like adults and to start taking responsibility for their actions, but we do not always give them the freedom to make the same types of decisions an adult is allowed to make. Walking away from a conflict, rather than reacting in an angry manner is something for which most of us would respect an adult; yet, too often our first tendency when dealing with students is to insist that the problem be dealt with here and now.

This strategy of dealing with conflict is only one element of our effort to create a positive school environment for our older students. Two other important factors in our overall plan are extracurricular activities and public recognition for outstanding student accomplishments. If we provide a wide enough variety of extracurricular activities, most students will identify school with personal interests or hobbies as well as with academics. By the same token, if students receive a significant portion of their status among their peers and within the community as the result of excelling in school activities, then they will be more likely to want to be in school and to do well in school. A wide variety of activities is important if we want to give as many students as possible the opportunity to find something at which they can excel.

I find it easier to keep elementary students happy because they usually carry less "baggage" with them. The baggage which older students often have to carry include boyfriend or girlfriend problems, substance abuse, pressures to succeed academically, pressures to contribute at home, and decisions about their futures, to name only a few. Because of these concerns, it is sometimes impossible for high-school teachers or even teachers of junior high students to get students to concentrate on their school work rather than personal problems.

Certainly, there are elementary students who have to deal with serious problems such as abuse or neglect, but the typical elementary student comes to school ready to be impressed. A well-prepared teacher, excited about what he or she is doing should be able to keep elementary students motivated and contented. My teachers have used techniques as simple as stickers on a chart, with students receiving rewards for accumulating a certain number of stickers. More involved strategies to keep student morale high among elementary students include a rather detailed system of choosing a "Student of the Week" for each class and then having a special activity at the end of the quarter for all of the students who were recognized as students of the week. The students' favorite activity, by far, was "Student of the Week Olympics," involving a series of games and activities, including scooter races, three-legged races, horseback carry races, pudding eating contests, and egg tossing competitions (the favorite of everyone except the janitor). As much as the students enjoyed the prizes they won during this activity, some were more delighted by the article written for the *Nome Nugget*, containing the names of all of the students and a humorous account of the activity.

This type of publicity has proven to be especially effective in our efforts to encourage students to give their best efforts. Virtually every week, at least three or four of our students will have their names mentioned on the radio or printed in the paper, recognizing them for their most recent accomplishments. Any opportunity to publicize

the good things that go on in the school should be seized. We regularly publicize honor rolls, perfect attendance lists, science-fair winners, art-fair winners, high scorers for every basketball game, wrestling results, and a variety of other honors earned by students. In addition to using radio stations and the regional newspaper to recognize student achievements, we also use public positions within the village, the local cable television announcement channel, the principal's newsletter, the school newspaper, and banners and bulletin boards around the school. The impact on a student when people outside of the school mention that they heard about a particular accomplishment should not be underestimated. The students, though, are not the only ones for whom this recognition is important. It usually means just as much to the parents.

The ideas discussed above are likely to foster a positive learning environment for students, but they affect staff only to the point that staff members are more content when working with happy students. Many of the same methods of recognizing student achievement can be used to acknowledge staff accomplishments. But most staff members would rather have input into decisions than have their names in the newspaper. This is where the second key to developing positive community/school relationships—sharing decision-making authority—comes in. There are, of course, decisions that must be made by the administrator alone; there may be times when, in spite of the wishes of others, an administrator makes a decision knowing it will be unpopular. Often, however, decision making can be a group effort and be just as effective. Most administrators—and I include myself here—feel that they do a better job of sharing decision-making authority than do those with whom they think they are sharing it. Perhaps this is because we make so many of what a colleague of mine calls "30-second decisions." Frequently, usually many times a day, administrators are called on to make instant decisions. Often these are decisions we do not even see as important enough to cause a controversy. Among the decisions of this type that I have made that I never imagined could cause a problem, but was proven wrong: Where should the staff coffee pot be set up? Who makes coffee for the staff? What night should be set aside for women's city league basketball and which night would be reserved for men's city league? What time should the pep rally start? Who will plan and run the pep rally? Which substitute should I call today? Should staff members be able to combine their pop order with the school's to get a better price? Who can use the school four-wheeler? Who can borrow tools from the school shop?

I'm not saying all of these decisions should be made by committee. I'm simply stating that we make many decisions that affect others without always knowing how others will react to those decisions. It is important that we choose our battles carefully. The pep rally issue above is one example where I lost the battle but won the war. It is my

opinion that there are benefits to having pep rallies, provided too much class time isn't lost. My experience has always been that the cheerleaders handle pep rallies. This was how it was done where I attended school and in schools where I worked as a teacher. My cheerleading advisor did not share this view, and she was distraught over the fact that I assumed she would plan and supervise all pep rallies. Her experience had been that any one of a number of school groups conducted pep rallies. I was more interested in having pep rallies than I was in who handled them. After discussing the issue with other staff members, I found that the high-school student council and their advisor were more than willing to plan a pep rally or two. So were the girls' basketball team, the senior class, and the junior high student council. The third- and fourth-grade class even wanted to get into the act. The issue of planning pep rallies is no longer a headache for me, and my cheerleading advisor is much happier with me now, too.

Among the decisions I try to share with the staff, the students, or our local advisory committee are planning of the high-school and junior-high course schedule, the school calendar, extra-activity schedules, some staffing decisions, how certain funds are spent, and eligibility requirements for participation in various activities. The problem with asking for input from others is that sometimes you find yourself in a position where you cannot please everyone involved. Most people, however, are reasonable enough to understand this dilemma, and they will accept not getting what they wanted in one situation provided they can identify other cases where their input resulted in a decision with which they were pleased.

The final key to developing positive community/school relations starts with coffee. That's right, coffee. Much visiting and a great deal of discussion about village concerns takes place over a cup of coffee. My office coffee pot is always at least half full and a supply of cups sits next to the coffee maker. One of the first things I do when visitors enter my office is offer them a cup of coffee. This seemingly unimportant gesture has led to many conversations that allowed me the opportunity to hear the views of the visitor and to discuss school affairs with parents and important community leaders in a friendly, nonthreatening manner. I've only had one instance where a visitor drank my coffee and yelled at me at the same time.

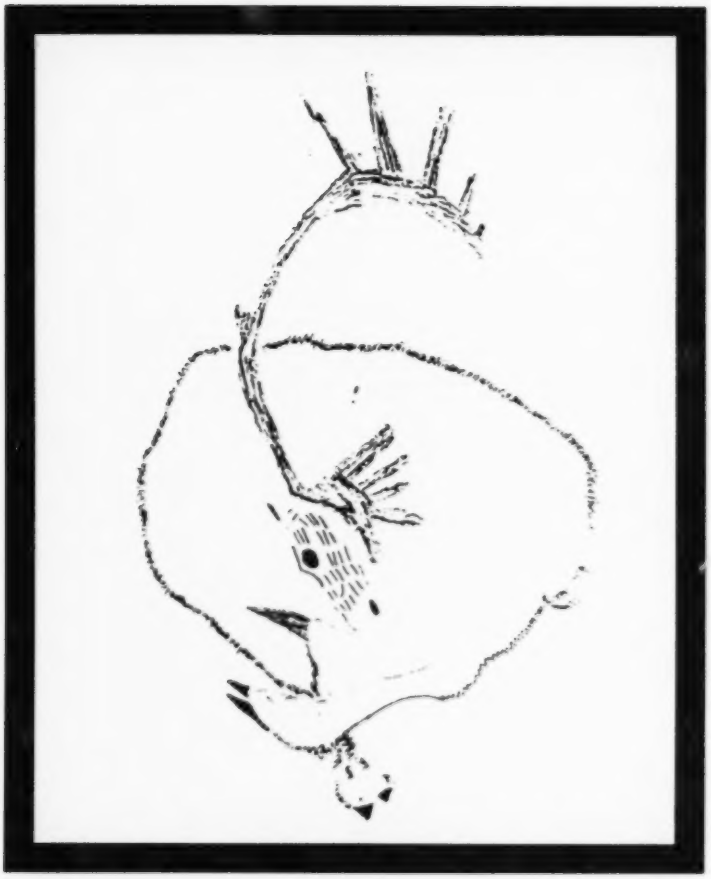
It's essential that schools and their administrators communicate more positive things than negative. If parents only hear from us when their children are failing a course or creating a discipline problem, it's no wonder that they tend to become defensive. After all, they see both the endearing and the less than desirable aspects of their children's character. They need to know that we are aware of both sides, too.

The public types of recognition of student accomplishments discussed earlier are one type of positive communication with parents and with the community in general. One of the more private forms of communication our staff has used includes individual conferences with parents held during an open-house activity. These conferences were not intended to be the same as a report card conference. Instead, the purpose was to get parents into the school and make them aware of what goes on in their children's classes. Students were encouraged to convince their parents to attend by holding a competition to see which class would have the highest percentage of parents in attendance. Students were also promised that their parents would hear only positive comments about them if they attended the open house. We had 98% of our students represented at the open house by a parent, grandparent, or another adult living in their house. This provided a valuable opportunity for parents and teachers to get to become better acquainted without having to discuss anything negative in nature.

Another example of our attempts to communicate with parents can be found in the local post office. A large poster on the wall asks, "Do you ever wonder what your child did in school today?" The rest of the poster is covered with Polaroid photographs and one sentence explanations (which always include students' names) of what is going on in the photographs. I do not include only special activities on the poster. The photo may show nothing more exciting than a fourth-grade math group working on a fractions activity in their textbook. But now the parents know that their fourth graders should know something about fractions, and that they did spend some time on fractions this week in school.

One other form of communication I use regularly (after stealing the idea from a colleague) is notes mailed to parents. It's common for a teacher to say to me something like, "Remember how bad Johnny's handwriting used to be? Well, today he handed in the neatest paper he's ever done." I have a supply of computer generated stationery with a graphic at the bottom that shows a plane with a message banner streaming behind it. On the banner is printed the sentence, "Your child is one reason I enjoy being a principal." I use this stationery to write short notes to parents. A typical note might say, "I was so pleased when I saw how neat Johnny's handwriting was on his journal assignment today. Please let him know that you are proud of him for this also." This short message, received in the mail, never fails to make at least two people—a student and a parent—happy; and it only takes about five minutes of my time. It's important that we brag about the good things going on in school and that we give students and parents something to brag about. It may not have occurred to a third grader or his parents that neat handwriting is something to be proud of.

It's my opinion that communicating the positive things that happen at school is an important part of building positive relations between the community and the school and should be viewed as an important aspect of an administrator's job. Some principals, though, consider the time spent dealing with public relations to be time taken away from the things they should be doing, namely increasing student achievement and facilitating staff improvement. I contend that there is a correlation between student achievement, and staff improvement on one side and recognition for accomplishments and input into decisions on the other. The number of positive things there are to share with the community will increase greatly when those involved know that they will be recognized for their accomplishments and when they know that they have some input into what goes on in the school. If you disagree with me, stop by my office sometime, and we'll have a cup of coffee together and discuss it.



Bringing About Change In Schools
An Orientation and An Attitude

David Hagstrom
Denali Elementary School
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As I write these words, I am uncertain about my true motive for making the move from university teaching to public school work. Perhaps I found the college level teaching unfulfilling in some way. Maybe I'd simply had it with the "politics" of the university academic setting. Perhaps I had listened to the irrational rantings and ravings of my learned colleagues for one too many times. For whatever the reason, I decided to leave academe—at least for awhile.

So much for my rationale for leaving. The reasons I was attracted to public school leadership after a 13 year sojourn into higher education takes a bit more in the way of reflective articulation. In the first place, I found compelling the challenge of "walking my talk." I was fond of telling my graduate students about good practices and great ideas. I would often reach back to my school leadership days in the early '70s and share what I called "million dollar suggestions." Students seemed to like the ideas I presented and I never "made up" any of the recommendations—but my ideas felt a bit stale and I longed for the excitement of the new practices I might create. And, while none of my graduate students ever doubted my credibility (to my face, that is), I often wondered if I might be of more help to them if I had more recent "firing line" experience. And then there was that all important and yet so simple matter of not really having a choice about becoming a school principal again. I was drawn to that school as if there was a giant magnet attached to the front door! Once asked, I had no choice.

And yet, there's more to be said about why I did what I did, and why I am continuing to do it. For years now, I've been displeased with what passes as educational leadership. Pronouncements delivered from on high have always bothered me. Advice givers have always annoyed me. The pendulum swings of "great ideas" in education have seemed so silly and wasteful. I've been disturbed that other professions change and grow but our schoolhouse professionals seem to be much the same today as they were at the turn of the century. Oh, there are a few bright and shiny classrooms and schools around

the world. But, for the most part, we're doing things pretty much the same way now as we did them during our parents' and grandparents' day. I had some ideas that, at the very least, had to be given a try! However, those ideas weren't so much specific programs and practices as they were approaches, driven by particular mindsets and value orientations.

For example, why shouldn't change in schools be instituted from the inside out? In other words, why shouldn't the people who inhabit the schools be the ones who decide what gets changed, why it gets changed, and at what pace it gets changed? Enough of this notion of having "wonderful ideas" stuffed down upon us by bureaucrats from above—bureaucrats who are often ignorant or misguided or whose motives are heavily influenced by power or other educationally unrelated reasons. Why shouldn't teachers participate more fully in the leadership functions in schools? Why shouldn't parents be asked to recommend the program directions that our schools should take? Why aren't these parents involved in the day-in-day-out decisions about important school policy issues? For years I'd been dealing with these questions in college classrooms. Now, I wanted to deal with them in a day-to-day school setting. I wanted to see if I had been asking the right questions. And I wanted to see if those persons who inhabit the schools (or at least one school) had some answers that hadn't often been heard.

So much for my decision to be a school principal again. Deciding is one thing; doing it is quite another matter! I was at a loss concerning what to do during those first few weeks. Here I was, this white haired grandfatherly-looking person poking around here and there, smiling a lot and simply trying to figure out what to do next. I felt pitifully inadequate. But by the time the teachers figured out my shortcomings, I'd figured out their strengths (at least some of them), and so we began to have conversations about what we wanted for our school. I had survived my "initiation" and they'd survived my arrival!

Not long after that, the teachers and I made a programmatic decision that provided the framework for many, many decisions to come. This decision would be the one that made possible the success we've achieved so far. This decision was motivated by the fact that, for the first year of my new principalship, I was half-time at the school and half-time at the university. I arrived at school every morning at seven-thirty, stayed until one, moved over to the university, and stayed there until nine o'clock. During the afternoon time, "someone" had to be "in charge" of the building. We wondered what would be the best way to see to it that the school had adequate supervision. The solution we came up with boosted our spirits, solved the immediate problem and established the beginnings of a sense of community. This one decision made many other things possible!

We established a Principal's Advisory Council and we developed our own Principal Internship Program. We decided that it made sense to have the three teachers

with the most years' service at the school serve on the Advisory Council and we felt that anyone who felt "called" to be a principal ought to have the chance to be an intern. It was really a simple programmatic scheme, but later we would come to call it inspired! Three teachers indicated an interest in being interns. So we divided the year into three parts, obtained afternoon substitutes for them during their "tour of duty," arranged university credit and encouraged them to add to the school in whatever way would be personally satisfying. Out of that invitation to be creative came: 1) a strong bonding with the local business community, 2) an innovative approach to schoolwide book-reading and storytelling, and 3) the establishment of a sister-school relationship with our counterpart in Japan.

This latter relationship has changed the ways we interact one with another in our school, and has created meaningful friendships among children and adults in both countries, while it has made our school the "talk of the town." And all of this has evolved simply because we needed someone to "tend the store" in the afternoons!

What we've been about at Denali Elementary School in Fairbanks, Alaska, is the instituting of a shared decision-making process. It began with the Principal's Advising Council. It continues as a way of creating a shared vision of what we want for our school. Ultimately we came up with an idea that embodies our shared vision: We chose to become what we called a "Discovery School," a place where the children could enjoy the quiet excitement of discovering the world around them and the joy of being successful learners.

It's difficult to pinpoint exactly **how** we came up with the idea of becoming Alaska's "Discovery School." We had begun meeting at six in the morning every Tuesday at the home of parents who live near the center of our school attendance area. The purpose of these meetings was to explore a possible focus for our school. In attendance from the start were five teachers and five parents. Right from the beginning, a science focus seemed likely. Parents were concerned that the school had neglected science. Teachers, while admitting a certain degree of science ignorance, indicated that they'd be willing to immerse themselves in new knowledge areas and in new ways to create an attitude of discovery among the children.

As the weeks went by, our breakfast gatherings were attended by more and more teachers, parents, **and** by university science professors and by individuals in the community at large who were interested in science technology and environmental concerns. What folks kept saying, time and time again, was that they wanted the children to truly appreciate the natural resources that are ours in Alaska and that they wanted these children to "give to rather than take from" Alaska. Out of these conversations came the

commitment to build Alaska' "Discovery School"—a school where both adults and children might discover new worlds of learning in science and mathematics. Specifically, this meant that we would be involved in environmental repair and rebuilding directly in and around our schoolhouse world. Out of this vision have come a number of science/math related projects, including 1) a complete landscaping plan for the school, one that will entice birds and other wildlife to return to the area around the school, 2) a greenhouse and community garden, 3) a major aluminum recycling project, 4) a computer-skills development program for teachers and children, and 5) a salmon-hatching project. Out of this vision have also come several innovative staff development efforts, including 1) a science class for teachers led by local university faculty, involving one-half day each week, within the school day, 2) a teacher exchange program with an Alaska Native village, and 3) the creation of a unique science coordinator/consultant position held by one of the teachers who has been released from regular classroom responsibilities.

While much more could be said about what has become of Denali's "7 Year Science Plan" and the staff development projects that are evolving as a part of it, it seems that one major significance of these efforts has more to do with the principal's orientation and attitude toward change than with specific programmatic changes. First, the principal **invited** teachers to become learners of subject matter again. The principal did not view teachers as deficient, but rather as capable of and interested in developing their science and mathematics backgrounds. Teachers invest themselves when they have a safe environment within which to learn and the presence of at least one person who believes in them. Second, when a principal **wholeheartedly believes** in teachers' capabilities and sets out to help them identify their strengths and interests, they do just that, and the children profit from their teachers' discoveries. Finally, **seeing the school community inclusively** can bring together all the people who care about the school to think about what is or what could be unique about the school and themselves. This attitude of "discovery" encourages folks to discover the best in themselves and what is best for their school. What the principal does in a school involved in such an evolution is to nurture its adults—its teachers, parents, and other community members. In turn these adults might then nurture the children and nurture the vision they have for their school.

I am now about to begin my third and final year on leave of absence from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. This next school year will be my last as principal at Denali School. As I look to this final year of "firing line experience," I am amazed at the progress we've made and yet I am astonished at what is yet to be done. Personally, I have learned much about how to be in a school setting. I've become more and more the

encourager and less and less the promoter. I've learned many new coaching skills and have become the cheerleader and builder of champions. I've been impressed with the leadership skills of teachers and amazed at what teachers can accomplish once they become determined and fired with an idea or ideal.

This experience has reinforced my notion that bringing about change in schools is not so much a matter of having some grand scheme. Rather, bringing about changes is the process of

(1) **bringing together the institution that is the school and all those who live within it,**

(2) **then introducing the concept of celebrating individual interests, talents, and strengths, and,**

(3) **together, identifying a path that makes sense for us as a school community.**

I am pleased with what we have accomplished. And yet I am disappointed with our efforts to "cheerlead" and encourage parents. I am convinced that in any school, and particularly in ours, powerful forces for good await our discovery among the parent community. We are about to embark upon a parent sponsored effort to have parents share hobby and career interests and talents with the children. Perhaps this activity will swell in magnitude and importance so that parents as well as teachers are more actively involved in our total schoolwide effort to celebrate the Discovery School vision. It is my hope that my ending year at Denali will be a time of celebration. My wish is that the Denali adults might celebrate the best that is within them for and among the children whom we fondly call "our Denali kids." I will look back upon my time at Denali as a success if we've identified the riches that we adults have within us and, thereby, have found ways to enrich the lives of children. Indeed, once we have assembled our separate talents into a truly unified team effort that moves us towards what we've come to believe is right for the children, we will all have good reason to take pride in what we've done together—for ourselves as well as for the children.

Student Discipline in a Bush School (Empowering the Village)

Roy Rowe
St. Paul Island, Alaska

We often hear from our real estate agent that the three most important criteria for the selection of a new home are location, location, and location. It might not be too far from the truth to say that in addition to cleanliness the three most important characteristics of a good school should be discipline, discipline, and discipline. Not everyone will agree that cleanliness and discipline make a good school, but it is difficult to refute the evidence that a school fraught with disruptive students and a physical appearance of neglect and vandalism is indicative of a poor learning environment. The evaluative criteria for accreditation by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges address such issues in the faculty self-study and resulting plan for school improvement. In short, you have to catch the students before you can teach them!

Tomes have been written about student behavior and assertive discipline, but for the purpose of this monograph let's define "good discipline" as that gut feeling you have as an administrator when you walk into a classroom and find a relaxed, but businesslike, atmosphere in which almost every student is following the teacher's instructions. You find students happily engaged in activities that can be traced to those lesson plans the teacher turned in at the first of the week. You sense a mutual respect between teacher and class that causes good things to happen. And who knows—maybe even some learning is taking place that can be measured on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills! The converse of good discipline need not be described in detail, except to say that it takes only one student to disrupt a class so completely that the rights of other students to an education are denied.

So how is student discipline in a Bush school different from any other school? It is different in that there is among many Natives a deep resentment of outside authority. In those villages where every facet of life was tightly controlled by the government (either Russian or U.S.) this is particularly true, and any white teacher or administrator is held suspect until found to be fair and just in dealing with conflict.

In addition, students are quite attuned to pick up on what they perceive to be examples of the unjust, authoritative behavior that they hear discussed or alluded to at

home. If a Native student thinks that he or she is being treated unfairly or isn't liked by the teacher, **all communication ceases.** It is not uncommon for the student to completely ignore any and all attempts by the teacher to communicate and may, in fact, cover his or her ears while staring away in utter defiance. If you attempt to remove the student from class, violent outbursts of screaming and shouting often result. Such behavior seems to be village specific, learned at an early age, and acted out most frequently between grades two and eight. If an entire class perceives that the teacher doesn't like children or perhaps is prejudiced against Natives, a conspiracy emerges in which every student, without exception, turns upon the authority figure as represented by the teacher. Such situations tend to be irreconcilable and end in disaster, as yet another teacher moves on to another job at year's end.

Empowering the Village

Where disruptive student behavior is clearly based upon prejudice learned at home and where attempts to gain parental help fail, there is still hope for modifying such behavior by seeking the understanding and assistance of the village at large. Several avenues exist for garnering this support. By far the most effective and influential source of power readily available to the non-Native administrator is Native school employees, such as paraprofessionals, aides, bilingual instructors, and secretarial and custodial help, who see the disruptive behavior firsthand for what it is—behavior which denies other students their right to an education. These employees are crucial to your success, because **only they** can validate your credibility in the village. Without their support, the white administrator will not last the three-year grace period, so often identified by Bush principals. Next in the formal school structure are your school board members. They need to know firsthand about severe student discipline problems, because they are entrusted by the village to safeguard the educational process. A board member's visit to the home of an uncooperative and nonsupportive parent can bring unexpectedly positive results!

And as a final avenue, the civil authorities can be brought into play when a law has been broken. Involve your local magistrate in school affairs. He or she must sit as an impartial adjudicator, but since there are no secrets in a Bush village, why not involve this important and locally powerful individual in various school activities?

The fact is that white teachers and administrators are guests in Native villages and that the only "power" that they possess is that which is entrusted to them by the village itself. The successful administrator is most probably one who can empower the village to take ownership of its school, while not feeling threatened.

Showing Writing in Native Alaska Yupik Eskimo Schools

John Kaufman
Kipnuk, Alaska

Alaskan village children battle with near existential despair. Reasons are legion, complex, elusive. Though intense and self-aware, the kids search for validity, worthiness, and selfhood. Alienation is often caused by culture clash and change, family disorder, schizophrenia, and often by village alcoholism. Depressed students demonstrate denial, escape, and drug misuse. The result is often further depression and attempted or completed suicide. Causes of student alienation are promoted by village isolation and difficult 10-month winters. These magnify and distort the social processes whereby we meet normal higher human needs, causing emotional disruption, and further pressuring village children.

Despite these unusual conditions, most Yup'ik kids are quite well-adjusted, but they tend to be very private people. Alaska village children particularly need personal validation through esteem-building, recognition, love, appreciation, personal value, worth, pride, confidence, belonging, and acceptance.

In view of these challenging circumstances, teachers are called upon to stretch their skills and professional resources to the maximum. Many Alaska teachers are using a communications approach, launching our classrooms on a journey of personal discovery. This student voyage in the language arts is known internationally as the writing-process approach.

The writing-process approach is fueled by a human need to write, to express, to be heard by others. I have a memory of Stan, a teenage student at risk, whose writing-process connection with personal poetry over 18 weeks lifted him from frequent suspensions and failing grades to participation in the state academic decathlon during that period.

How can the writing process help with this need? To know that our meaning has been sensed, we need to share responses to our writing with significant others. Sharing writing and responding to the writing of others is the essence of the classroom writing process as practiced by participants in the Alaska Writing Consortium.

Jim was a gifted first grader who could not yet read sight words or write legibly. But his teacher patiently shared stimulating classics and other stories with Jim, helping him to make interesting stories of his own, which were tape-recorded, transcribed, and published within the school. Now as a fourth grader, Jim is reading widely and voraciously, and is a key member of the Kipnuk reading team which won second place in the Alaska State Battle of the Books.

Process writing can lead to recorded expression of personal experiences in a variety of literary modes. Those feelings, memories, problems, loves, achievements, and sensitivities which Native students formerly have rarely expressed in spoken language, or consciously recalled, quickly come into expression during a writing workshop.

To share these experiences and the responses of others is important to our humanity. Literary forms become purposeful and personally useful, organic rather than academic exercises. Process writing depends very much upon responses from other students, who are often emotional alter egos of the student who is sharing or telling about the writing. Trust and confidentiality are prerequisites; a supportive climate is carefully created over many months of effort.

Student success in showing writing develops confidence in the ability to communicate important ideas and feeling appropriately and effectively to selected audiences. When children know they are able to effectively communicate experiences, ideas, and feelings, existential despair is averted by the hope and anticipation of sharing with sentient and significant persons. The hopeless frustration that "no one can understand" is vanquished.

The process writing approach could be supported for healthy child development purposes in the nation's schools while simultaneously answering the need for improved literacy in the humanities, arts, and sciences. An organic language development process in the classroom encourages the natural ways children learn and gives rise to a rebirth of concept development within the "real" experience of the child.

Each child is a pinpoint of hope and radiance in a mysterious universe. No one has greater awareness of this than the parents and teachers of Native American children. May we teach with care!!

This note is dedicated with gratitude to all the Kipnuk staff, to the teachers from New Hampshire, Maine, California, and Alaska, and all those who have shared and developed the writing process in their classrooms. Let's get involved in this fundamental revolution in the language arts! A classroom writing workshop may be the laboratory wherein many new discoveries lie waiting, such as the therapeutic expressive mode found in Kipnuk, Alaska.

"I Know How You Love Challenges..." (Excerpts from the Journal of a First Year Bush Teacher)

Mim Chapman
Aleknagik, Alaska

Editor's Note of Caution and Invitation to Read: In Alaska, much has been said about new, white teachers coming to Alaskan Native communities. Mim Chapman, now an extraordinarily creative and successful school principal in Aleknagik, Alaska, writes here about her first year as a teacher in rural Alaska. The reader should be cautioned before beginning this journal that the writer has been quite honest to her own feelings and reactions. Mim's journal responses are included here in the hope that her "early on" responses to village conditions and situations might help us all better prepare our teachers for productive and successful work with children from rural communities in Alaska. You are invited to read with an eye towards determining changes needed in the way teachers are "prepared" for their teaching assignments in rural Alaska.

September 10, 1984

They said it was small, but this is unreal! It was kind of exciting, flying across the mountains and open space, feeling the awe of new terrain, new adventure, new challenge.

A pickup bumping past a few houses, lots of oil barrels, and lots of kids, no trees no grass, but a pretty river and distant mountains, and all those dark-haired children looking at me, wondering who I am, and me wondering the same about them.

The pickup deposited me at my "beautifully furnished one-bedroom house." It's 15'x25', (the old generator shack I've now been told) lit by one naked florescent bulb hung from the ceiling with coat hangers and wired in with black electrical tape. The refrigerator is full of blood and mold and utter cruddy filth. The stove's too putrid to touch—thank God I don't like to cook! And four tiny windows look out at a decapitated trailer and lean-to.

I panicked when I couldn't find the cord for my tape deck—but at last found it and put on a Beethoven violin concerto, sat down on the floor in the middle of my boxes, and

cried for my asparagus fern, my window over looking the mountains, the harbor, and a telephone!

September 11, 1984

I am observing my predecessor teach—(he was held over two days to "train" me). The "music room" is even worse than my "beautifully furnished house." Stacks of cardboard boxes all over the place, no structure at all—not a bulletin board or blackboard in the room, only haphazardly torn hunks of dark blue butcher paper unevenly stapled across parts of the pumpkin orange walls "to darken it a bit," he explains...

The floor is littered with wadded-up pieces of notebook paper (are there no custodians in this school, I wonder?). A desk and piano buried under piles of papers grace one end of the room. At the other end is a messy stack of metal folding chairs.

Kids storm in screaming and throwing things, but smile when they see me. They grab chairs, fighting while they set them up in haphazard order. A record is placed on the record player, a few students sing along, while others throw paper airplanes talk and giggle.

As for the rest of the staff, they're straight out of central casting! But maybe first impressions are misleading, so I'll wait and see. Nonetheless, I'm glad I brought lots and lots of books.

Glad I have two days to clean and scrub and "observe" before I actually teach. How will they accept me? Can I fit in? Will I succeed? And can I really exist out here without even telephones?

Music will be fun, but Algebra I and II? I haven't contemplated a variable since high school... and this place looks like it's got plenty of variables to contemplate!

October 12, 1984

"Gonna shoot my guts out!" The 20 year old kid stood in front of his house, put a shotgun in his belly, an awkward position at best, and shot, while his sister picked up the C.B. to call for help.

It was four o'clock or a sunny Saturday afternoon, and no one was on the horn, her call unanswered, the 14-year-old girl walked back outside. What did she think when she saw the gruesom e, bloody sight?

Not 200 yards away, in my generator shack of a house, I heard the shot, thought little about it—a hunter shooting rabbits in the brush—reminded myself not to let the cats out during the day.

A couple of hours later I saw the village backhoe working across the street, digging in the yard of our library aide and her family. It was strange for them to be working on Saturday, and I wondered why.

It wasn't until Monday morning that I found out what had happened. He still wasn't dead, had been medevacked to Anchorage unconscious—guts were all over the yard—couldn't clean them up so the backhoe dug up the bloody dirt and took it out of town...

"He'd threatened suicide for a long time, but no one thought he'd do it."

"He'd been one of our brightest students. I wonder why he did it."

"He was high from sniffing gas. He'd been sniffing since ninth grade."

Three kids had died the year before, plastic bags over their heads, mouths clamped over the gas tanks of their three wheelers. Why had no one done anything? What could be done?

"Had anyone tried to help him?" I asked naively. "Did he talk to anyone? He'd been threatening suicide, you say. Did he get counseling? Can't sniffing gas be a plea for help? What was done for him?"

The principal called me into his office. "You're new to the Bush. Just go on with school like nothing happened—don't even say anything, it's not polite to discuss personal things, or feelings. Furthermore, it's none of our business."

Tuesday the word came that he died. His mother didn't miss an hour of work. Howard, his brother, got his highest grade yet on the algebra test, and Lena (the sister on the C.B.) played a trumpet duet in band.

The body arrived on Friday. The funeral was arranged for four o'clock that day, so it would be over in time for Howard to play basketball against Togiak, our chief rivals, at seven that night. As usual, he was the high scorer of the game.

"Couldn't we at least invite the drug and alcohol counselor out to talk to the kids about substance abuse?" I asked. "Those psychologist types are all just hot air," said the principal, "Furthermore, it would disrupt the schedule, and you know how mad that would make the staff..."

This is starting to feel like a horrible dream or a weird Felini flick! Guts being dug up by a backhoe, kids killing themselves sniffing gas from their sno-go tanks, brothers rushing home from a funeral to play basketball, school going on as if nothing had happened, actors sleepwalking through a scene of madness and mayhem. And no one seeing the pain and grief that has to be there. No one sensing the isolation and alienation of village young people. No one even wondering if it was that which led to the suicide. No one feeling the frustration of kids caught between two worlds. No one willing to talk about anything, look at anything, or even **think**.

How long will it be until I turn into a zombie like the rest of the staff? Or are they right, there's nothing we can do, and it's not our business? But not allowed to discuss life, or pain, or dreams, or feelings? If it were polite to ask questions, what would I learn?

And the haunting, ever-present question remains—is my very presence here a part of the problem?

November 10, 1984

I can still feel—so I'm not dead (although this is as close as I care to get...). My small, dark, womb of a house is warm and cozy, my new turntable just arrived, they say they will give me a rug soon, and there are fresh (frozen) croissant in the freezer.

The prints are framed and hung, my soft sculpture hangs from the dark walls, there is snow on the mountain, the river is silver, but my windows face the generator shed and the trailer instead.

I'll be 42 next week, and the following week I go back to Cordova, to teach a weekend seminar on mid-life crisis. I can't stand to read another article about "vaginal atrophy" while everything vital about me is in a state of atrophy out here!

No one reads, there are no newspapers, not even in the school library, an original idea would die of lack of nourishment in the staff lounge, I wonder what percentage here even knows who is President—or cares!

I, too, have made my choices, and am equally limited by them. (No one forces me to be single, or a teacher, or here...).

The picture of Niilante over my desk, chip on the nightstand, Jan Egbert on the wall, remind me that I, too, am a slave of my culture and my time. Even love wasn't enough to enable me to fit into their worlds. So why do I think I can stretch into this one? (But would I really be less lonely in New York?)

March 15, 1985

What ever happened to **pride**? I ran screaming and crying to the principal at last. I can't stand the laziness of this (deleted) place! I've never seen so many **blobs** in one place in my life! Our white staff consists of whiny blobs, screaming blobs, and some too blobby to even describe. And we're supposed to be educating these kids? To be what? Mini-blobs caught between two worlds? No wonder they don't give a hang about school, don't try, don't work.

How many times have I begged for an Awards Assembly, Student of the Month, a teacher's meeting to discuss scheduling, teaching methods, culture, discipline, graduation, **anything**, but to no avail. And I'm sick of even having to vacuum my own classroom.

I haven't had a single adult conversation for three weeks, and that was when I flew into Dillingham to call Shari in New York, Tee in D.C., and Joan in Cordova!

I've started to tape record poetry then play it back, just to satisfy my need to hear a friendly voice! Last night I had a long conversation with my tape deck about Walden, the challenges and benefits of "going to the woods to face the essentials of life," and whether that related to my being here, then I listened to the tape to see if it made any sense. Help! I'm going crazy!!

May 7, 1985

The results of the community school committee vote still surprise me. All the *kassaq* teachers voted out except one other teacher and me. Everyone says I'm crazy to return, with all the rest of the staff leaving. But I'm just starting to figure out what's going on around here, and I hate to quit before I've learned enough to earn my keep. Furthermore, the odds are that the new crew has to be better! Even one intelligent teacher would make life here bearable, and I hear we'll have telephones by Thanksgiving!

Preservation of the Total Person

Stan Miller
Scammon Bay, Alaska

"What have I done?" I kept asking myself that question over and over as I headed east on Highway 84 out of Portland, Oregon. The late April rain splattered over the car windows and added to the aura of excitement and apprehension I was feeling. I had just finished an interview with Keith Evans, Superintendent of the Lower Yukon School District. I had a foreboding suspicion that I was going to be the school principal in a village called Scammon Bay located somewhere near the Yukon River on the Bering Sea. "What have I done? What have I done?"

I spent the next few weeks unearthing all I could about Scammon Bay and the Lower Yukon School District. Not much was available in the local libraries or travel offices in the Newport area. I did locate some general information in the *National Geographic* magazine and University of Oregon library. In reality, I had little more information than the limited amount the Lower Yukon District had provided candidates during the Career Fair. A basic description of the village and how to get in and out were all I knew.

Ed Beans, Director of Personnel, called on May 10, 1989 and offered the job. I accepted on the spot. What a high, although I still felt a bit of trepidation. What have I done? Next came the process of separation and leaving, an endless parade of seal and blubber jokes, a multitude of questions I didn't have answers for, planning, packing, shipping, and all the details involved with moving. A good friend suggested that I was bound for an adventure in the Arctic. I believe he was right, although a sense of uncertainty was uppermost in my thoughts. I kept procrastinating on most of the important tasks, a warning symptom of my unsettled condition. I needed a change, but was this the right one? Not knowing what I was getting into, the self-doubt about my abilities as an administrator and anxiety about my ability to adjust to a new lifestyle without the security of family and friends were responsible for many sleepless nights. I, quite honestly, was scared.

Summer vacation arrived and flew by. The process of moving, the details of changing my entire way of life, and an unknown lifestyle in a Yupik Eskimo village near the Bering Sea permeated everything my girls and I did together that summer. What have

I done? The pain of separation and loss was, at that time, offset by the excitement of the unknown and the atmosphere of adventure. I was finally going to be a principal, an occupation for which I had spent the last several years preparing myself.

It's now early February and I've been in Scammon Bay for seven months. I still ask myself, What have I done? My perspective on what is really important has changed, my priorities have been rearranged, and my personal state of being has reached a crisis level. What I had done was leave my family, most importantly my daughters. I had come to a culture and lifestyle which I was not prepared to comprehend. I had left a group of friends that were among the finest and truest any one person could ever hope to enjoy. I had left a job and a situation with little opportunity for movement or satisfaction for one that I thought was just the opposite. I suppose I traded personal stability for career advancement. You see, my heart and soul are still in Oregon, my job is in Alaska. It's vital, I have learned, to bring some of your personal and professional support systems with you to the Bush. I didn't. I was not prepared emotionally or mentally for the isolation, separation from my daughters, family, friends, or the absence of recreational and avocational activities that were a prominent part of my life for many years.

The job itself is the saving grace in my life this year. The work is totally unique. Each day is different from the rest. Is it hard? In a word, **no**. It is challenging. Learning a new position, all the little quirks, expectations, and tricky problems that confront me each day is exhilarating. For example, I arrived in Scammon Bay and discovered, through the grapevine, that the school secretary had resigned over the summer. Who was going to show me the ropes? Two construction projects were in process and fish camps and subsistence hunting competed for the construction workers time and energy. School was scheduled to start in just two weeks. The gym was full of building materials, classrooms looked like disaster areas, the schedule needed to be changed and new students registered. Bruno Kasayuli, Sr., the maintenance supervisor simply told me "Don't worry, we will be ready. You will see." He was right. The previous principal had left an excellent set of records. I was able to read an accurate history of the site for the past two years. The records were a great help but I still needed assistance sifting through the maze of paperwork, processes, people, and practices that make a school function effectively. Bruno solved the problem by recommending a temporary secretary who had some knowledge of the school from last year.

Although I stumbled along for the first few months, I managed to keep everyone busy including myself. As is normal for new principals, I made the typical blunders and scored a few coups along the way. The pace was so fantastic, it all seems like a blur now. Learning about the school, the village, and the people took all of my time and energy.

Trying to understand the invisible parts of the culture took an extraordinary amount of mental energy. Scammon Bay, like many in this region, is in the process of a major cultural shift. Forced by economic factors beyond its control, the village is beginning to shift from a subsistence lifestyle to a cash controlled existence. The implications of this change create a multitude of challenges and conflicts for the educational system. The most difficult conflict to contend with is the fact that although parents say that they support education, their attitudes toward their children's attendance, discipline, nutrition, and rest effectively offer no support. By far the hardest challenge I faced was the expectation to be on the job 24 hours a day seven days a week. By Christmas I was exhausted both physically and mentally.

December was difficult. A very caring and concerned staff made me aware of some significant and unsettling changes in my behavior. I had become introverted, reclusive, unable to focus or concentrate on even the simplest tasks. My personal and professional relationships with staff and students were faltering. My sleeping, eating, and working habits had changed. I was working more, enjoying it less, and accomplishing very little. In short, I was depressed both physically and mentally. I spent Christmas vacation in Oregon with my family. The time away from Scammon Bay allowed ample opportunity for the reflection and evaluation of my "new" life. After my brief respite, it was actually difficult for me to return to Bush Alaska. I realized then, and I have now confirmed, that what I had done was to sacrifice and transform much of who and what I was in exchange for a career. The unhealthy adaptations I had made to the situation were destroying my inner self. I finally realized that I needed to leave Scammon Bay.

My resignation was accepted by the Regional School Board in February. Although I am a "lame duck" principal, there is a great deal of work to complete before the end of this year. Planning for the next school year and the next principal is already on the fast track. I am determined to leave a well-organized facility and staff so the new administrator has an easy time adjusting in Scammon Bay. Professionally, I know I have the ability to be a quality school leader. I intend to search for a position that will encourage and allow me to regain much of what I mistakenly put aside. I want to remember that I am in this business to have a positive effect on both kids and communities. Therefore, I must put into motion changes in both my personal and professional life that will bring balance back into my being. I realize now that a thoughtful and reflective balance is necessary in all facets of my life for a positive and healthy approach to living.

What have I done? I have learned a most consequential reality. As a public school administrator, an equilibrium must be preserved between the job and one's personal life

in order to be truly effective. A reflective and conscious effort is necessary to build and preserve the total person. If we are to be truly effective as principals, we must not sacrifice our personal lives for our profession.

Elementary Principals Must Be Advocates

Mark Shellinger
Fairbanks, Alaska

Should an elementary school principal be a change agent? Should the principal serve as a true advocate for restructuring a school and the priorities of a community? Most principals were taught by peers, supervisors, and university staff who suggested that the answer be "no, don't rock the boat." Veteran principals relate the same story: A "good" elementary principal, as judged by superintendents and school boards, is one who keeps the waters calm and does not generate controversy. Compare this with what restructuring experts across the country are telling us now. They want elementary principals to take the lead in a radical reprioritization of values within school districts and communities. They want principals to truly empower staffs and parents, to seek innovation, and to demand a better program for children.

Elementary principals should take a deep breath and embrace the opportunity. Never before in American education has there been such an opportunity to truly improve elementary education. However, it is a threatening opportunity as well. We were taught just the opposite of what we're being asked to do now. Can we, in good conscience, pass up this chance? As educators we know what will make elementary schooling more effective: lower class size, developmentally appropriate practices, integration of special education and support staff, freedom to create new programs, adequate funding.

What stops us from putting our knowledge into practice? Part of the problem is that unions lessened their demands for equity between levels of public education when they won equal pay for elementary teachers. The pressure for equity was lessened once elementary teachers were put on the same salary schedule as their secondary colleagues. But what about equity for students at different levels? What is the logic in spending up to twice as much to educate each secondary student as we do for each elementary child? Why has this patently unequal practice continued? More importantly, why do we allow this when the research clearly shows that a child's first years in school are by far the most important and generally determine success in future schooling and in later life?

Habit and the training of elementary principals is one reason for the inequality. Another factor is that supervisors for elementary principals are seldom experienced or interested in primary education. How many superintendents do you know who have

elementary experience? It is a rare district that has anyone in central administration who is a strong advocate for elementary education or has an elementary background.

Compare elementary and secondary principals. Secondary principals are expected to be assertive, to fight for their programs. They have been successful in most districts in obtaining an unequal share of the fiscal resources as well as command of the central administrative structure. They are coalition builders, effectively using their school/community constituencies to effect change. Not so with elementary principals. However, things are bound to change because of the current national attention on elementary schools.

Why is this national focus on primary education? Reform efforts at the secondary level for the past decade point to the futility of expecting dramatic student change when the intervention comes as late as high school. Program evaluations have repeatedly suggested earlier and earlier intervention. It is ironic that the failure of more money, attention, and programs at the secondary level brings public attention finally to elementary schools.

The National Association of State Boards of Education published what could be considered a terrorist handbook for an assault on the current structure. *Right From the Start* proposes such radical change as lowering class size to 14 and creating primary units within each school with an entirely different focus on what's important. This landmark report suggests expanding the role of elementary programs, involving parents in classrooms and decision making, collaborating with advocacy groups and community agencies, providing additional support staff such as counselors and parenting specialists, involving the school in child care programs, and scheduling time for staff training. It is amazing that such a dramatic proposal is coming from such a staid group. It is equally amazing, and alarming, that elementary principals are largely absent from leadership roles in this effort.

Elementary principals can take a leadership role by serving as advocates. We can couple the assertiveness modeled by our secondary colleagues with what we are best at: involvement with the instructional programs at our schools. We can take a facilitator's role in building the support structure necessary to change district priorities. Identification of needs within a school community is a good place to start. Work with parents and staff to develop programs that meet student needs. Then take those programs to central administration and school board members and expect funding and support. Advocate for at least an equal share of fiscal resources and decision-making power.

Radical? Yes. Diabolical? No. In fact the 1990s may be the decade when the traditional elementary principal becomes the dinosaur of educational evolution and the

elementary principal advocate becomes the dolphin leading the elementary school to a priority position in public education. Students at all levels will benefit from the changes that we know from experience and research will work. The question is will elementary educators be left behind still trying to calm the waters?

The Question of Being At Risk

Bernice Tetpon
Barrow, Alaska

For the past six months I have read many articles and attended several meetings concerning at-risk youth. The definition of being at risk covers many complicated areas affecting the total youngster. Many of us include the following characteristics as part of the identification process of students at risk:

a. poor self-esteem,
b. poor self-concept,
c. poor attendance record,
d. low achievement records,
e. problems with drugs or authority, and
f. many others, including lack of motivation to learn and being easily distracted from learning.

The list can go on and on. The key words I have found are "poor," "low," and "problems." Are those words interchangeable? The answer is yes. Why have we as educators, parents, and community members allowed our youngsters to carry these characteristics with them for the past two decades? From the literature, we are told that early detection of youth at risk is necessary for early prevention. How do we change the characteristics to read excellent or even average? I suggest the following recommendations towards a positive solution.

Recommendations for Teacher Education

1. Teacher education must incorporate teaching teachers how to teach the at-risk student. Teaching methods must involve teachers learning to remediate, tutor, and counsel while at the same time developing teaching methods in the content areas.

2. Teacher education must focus on teachers continuing their own academic and personal growth while they are in the process of teaching students to grow both

academically and personally. We cannot expect students to grow academically and personally unless we are also personally involved in that process.

3. Teachers must be given early practicums in classrooms with teacher mentors who are masters at remediation, tutoring, and counseling students. This practicum can begin in the second year of teacher education and continue throughout the four-year teacher education process to ensure practical fieldwork and clear expectations for the teacher.

Recommendations for the Administrator

1. Schooling for administrators must focus upon the people aspect of schooling. Often times, administrative courses present budgetary and building concepts and theories rather than people, which is what schooling is all about.

2. To truly become instructional leaders, building administrators need the full support of the board of education and central office administration to become free from the daily paperwork assigned to them. Rather than asking building principals to do more paperwork, central office administration must develop ways to handle the bulk of paperwork now required of building principals.

3. Building administrators must ensure that teachers have the flexibility to discuss student progress or the lack of progress. Staffing time must be made available for teachers to discuss their concerns about individual students and recommend courses of study to help students succeed.

4. Teachers who are new to a building need the support of the building administrator who must assign a teacher/mentor to the new teacher and involve the new teacher in discussions of student progress.

5. A formal procedure for identifying students at risk must be initiated by the building administrator and communicated to the faculty. This procedure could involve teacher referral, and a review committee made up of teachers, counselors, and the building administrator. Not only must a procedure for identifying students at risk be formally set up but a monitoring and reevaluation process must follow to provide the best course of study for the student who is at risk. Without the building administrator's involvement, this procedure may not get the support needed for ongoing success.

6. Administrators must involve the parents in the process and reporting of individual student progress either through face-to-face communications or written progress reports.

Recommendations for the Board of Education

1. The board of education must adopt an at-risk policy indicating their responsibility to provide the resources needed in the areas of remediation, tutoring, counseling, and ongoing positive progress of each student at risk.

2. The board of education must require a progress report from the central office administrators responsible for the building administrators' on-site at-risk programs. A schoolwide ongoing reevaluation and monitoring process must support the building procedure.

Although these recommendations involve teacher education, administrative monitoring, and board support, a commitment by the entire community must also exist. Community support may mean networking of social services agencies, school personnel, and parents to provide the most positive and beneficial support for each of our students at risk. School districts alone cannot remedy the at-risk crisis we are currently experiencing. We, as a community, must become a part of the solution. How will the community become involved?

All of us are aware of what some communities are doing to help provide a solution. Some of these activities are listed below.

1. Individuals within the community have become mentors and child advocates for students who have no one to turn to.
2. Businesses have provided on-the-job training and monitored the progress of student workers.
3. Teachers have "adopted" students while tracking student progress.
4. Social workers have communicated with school personnel concerning individual student welfare.

There are many ways to win the battle of at risk. The question is are we ready to make the commitment and take the challenge of winning the battle of students at risk as a school district and as a community?

Girdwood Elementary/Junior High
A Rural School in an Urban District

Bruce Lamm
Girdwood, Alaska

Girdwood Elementary/Junior High School offers the best of both worlds. We consider ourselves lucky to be a part of the largest school district in Alaska, while still maintaining a small-town, rural identity. In spite of, or even because of, our size, location, and configuration, we offer students an exemplary program. As principal, I would like to take full credit for the great and wonderful things happening at Girdwood, but I must give credit to a wonderful staff, great kids, a supportive community, and the help and support from the Anchorage School District.

When I was first contacted and invited to contribute an article to this publication, the message I heard was "Girdwood is unique—tell us about it." In this article, I will attempt to acquaint you with Girdwood School and some of the things we are doing to make learning more enjoyable for students and staff alike. If you have questions that are left unanswered, please contact me or, better yet, drop in for a visit.

The School: Girdwood Elementary/Junior High School is located 40 miles south of Anchorage at the base of Mt. Alyeska and surrounded by mountains. It is the only K–8 school in the Anchorage School District and, with approximately 130 students, one of the smallest. Also housed on site is a branch of the municipal library and the community school office. We therefore see everyone in town sometime during the year. It is truly a community school and, as a result, we get a lot of community support.

The Program: Having kindergarten through eighth grades in the same building is not unusual in rural Alaska, but can be confusing in Anchorage. Working under both elementary and secondary divisions only becomes confusing at budget time. At Girdwood, we're optimists and make the best of everything. We have a host of innovative, child-centered programs in various subject areas and integrated throughout the curriculum. The program we are most proud of is our SOIREE.

SOIREE (Society of Interesting Reading Enticing Everyone) is a multigrade, literature-based approach to language arts instruction. It was developed by and is continually being refined by the staff. It is based on our belief that children need to be exposed to quality literature and that good literature is not grade specific.

SOIREE is a two-week program, held twice a year, based on a schoolwide theme. Each teacher chooses a book or books based on the schoolwide theme and develops lessons, activities, projects, etc., based on the theme and his or her book. Class-size collections of the books are gathered through interlibrary loan or are purchased. During the week before SOIREE, a ballot is prepared, and I go to each classroom and read passages from each book. Students then vote for their first, second, and third choices. Class lists are then prepared. (During the last SOIREE, over 90% of the students received their first or second choice.) Teachers finish developing lessons appropriate for a group of students that may contain representatives from all grades K–8.

SOIREE becomes the language arts program for these two weeks. Students get to change rooms and interact with younger or older students. Enrichment activities, peer tutoring, and cooperative groups are used not only to read and discuss the book, but also to work through lessons that integrate writing, speaking, and listening. Literature has come alive for many of our students. Younger students were very proud of reading "long" books, and several students of all ages felt that "the book was better than the movie."

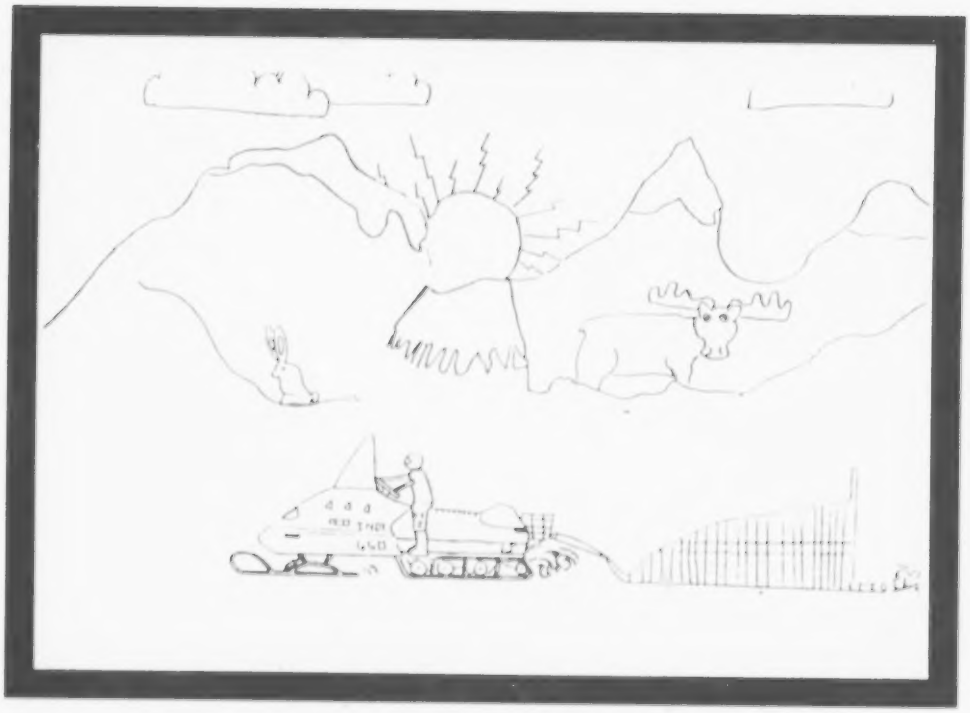
At the end of each SOIREE, we have a special day related to our theme. Last February, our theme was love. On February 14th, we had a "love-in." Parents, teachers, Anchorage School District teacher experts, and Gerish Library staff presented sectionals based on love, Valentine's Day, or the heart. This October, we ended our space SOIREE with an "intergalactic extravaganza," again using community and district presenters and even a speaker from NASA. These days provide closure and allow us to fully integrate other curricular areas into the program.

SOIREE is a great success at Girdwood. The students enjoy participating, staff enjoys presenting, and parents are supportive. The product is rewarding, but the process that brought us to this point is even more so. SOIREE, Sea-River Week, science Olympiad, classroom publishing centers, a student-published literary magazine, and many more learning opportunities have happened here because of an excellent site-based, staff-development program. With the aid of a school-based instructional improvement grant, and the invaluable help and support from the ladies of the Anchorage School District Curriculum and Instruction Division, we began to enrich and improve the exceptional existing program.

The success of our program is directly related to the dedication of the staff. I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank and praise Girdwood teachers. I have never worked with a more energetic, hard-working, self-motivated, and caring staff. They have managed to bring the theories into practice and the ideas into reality. I believe that schools must develop empowering climates which allow programs that support the growth of students and staff. We have tried to implement site-based programs that are not only educational, but are exciting and enjoyable for both students and teachers. I believe we are achieving this goal.

Successful programs also need support from outside the school. We are extremely lucky to have both a supportive community and school district. PTA and the community school board have supported us with funds and volunteer resource people to enrich programs. Support at the district level has not only been instructional, but also ideological. Anchorage School District really wants to make a difference for kids. With this philosophy from the school board and superintendent, programs similar to ours are happening throughout Anchorage. Resources are also made available. In-services, classes, and resource persons are accessible for almost any subject. I know that I must express my gratitude to the Curriculum and Instruction Division, especially Elaine Snowden, for all they have done for the teachers and children of Girdwood.

There are many benefits to being a rural school in an urban district. Collectively, these benefits have produced a positive educational environment at this school. The climate is such that learning seems to flourish, teachers want to teach, and students want to learn.



"Restructuring Our Public Schools" Birch School: Transition to Integration

Chris Williams
Fairbanks, Alaska

In 1956 Birch Elementary School (Fairbanks North Star Borough School District) was built to serve kindergarten through fourth-grade students from the North Post Fort Wainwright housing area. When in the late 1960s there was a decline in the numbers of dependent families on base brought about by the Vietnam War, Birch School became a special education school which exclusively served handicapped children from ages three through 21.

However, the advent of Public Law 94-142 which opposed segregated educational settings for handicapped students mandated a further need for change. In 1985, as new principal, Chris Williams undertook the tasks of desegregation and reestablishment of an integrated community school. Over the past five years, Birch Elementary School has developed into an integrated early childhood program which is well accepted by staff, students and parents.

In addition to the unique "people relations" tasks brought about by the school restructuring process, various budgetary restrictions, physical setting adjustments, curriculum and staff changes increased the challenge. Without sizable changes in school budget, the entire building had to be altered to accommodate regular educational needs: specialized structures had to be removed, surplus furniture for regular education programs located and transferred from other schools, entire curriculum materials needed for early childhood programs borrowed or purchased, new operational procedures developed, and sensitive, skilled school staff with cross-credentials in both regular and specialized education carefully selected.

It was vitally important that all pieces mesh, in order to produce the desired change necessary for implementation of programs designed to provide quality early childhood experiences to all children which would address the following goals:

- to improve instructional programs for **all** students within the least restricted environment,

- to develop an appreciation and acceptance for individual differences and the interdependence of mankind, and
- to develop distinct interpersonal behaviors which focus upon individual dignity and self-esteem.

Through our five year plan—five distinct phases—we have focused upon:

- creating a climate for change by helping parents, staff, and community accept the desegregation of special needs students,
- involving parents and staff in planning for facilitating change,
- welcoming our "pioneer" groups of regular education students,
- implementing regular classroom participation for severely handicapped children with peer modeling and establishing our "big friend" program,
- double and triple dosing of academics for mildly handicapped special needs students within classroom, and
- integrating regular classroom special education resource delivery.

Phase I, 1985–1986: Creating the Climate for Change

Bringing about change to well-established practices can be threatening. Mrs. Williams worked with Central Office administration to develop a program to educate apprehensive parents, staff, and community members regarding the benefits of "least restrictive" educational settings. In addition to identifying likely school sites for student relocation, she addressed integration issues at parent and staff meetings and in sessions with principals throughout the school district, appeared on local media shows, organized handicapped awareness puppet shows, coordinated teacher and parent visiting and exchange programs, and involved citizens and community clubs in active school support programs.

Phase II, 1986–1987: Parent/Staff Planning and Early Relocations

After gaining the increased confidence and support of parental, staff, and community groups, Mrs. Williams relocated two classrooms of moderately/severely handicapped students at other school sites—Tanana Junior High School and Fort Wainwright Elementary. With the remaining school staff and parents, Mrs. Williams and architectural planners worked to incorporate specialized classroom designs into new building models which would better serve the instructional and safety needs of those severely/profoundly handicapped students scheduled for future transition.

Phase III, 1987–1988: Early "Pioneers" of Integration

When several more classes were moved from Birch to Ticasuk Brown Elementary, two regular education kindergartens and one first-grade class were brought into Birch Elementary School. These "pioneer" classes of 1999 and 2000 were comprised of young children from North Post and 801 military housing units on Fort Wainwright.

Teachers experienced in both regular and special education were hired to teach these newly established classes. These educators, with the remaining special education staff, parents, and the building principal worked together in the development of a plan which would encourage the integration of handicapped and nonhandicapped students throughout Birch Elementary School's instructional program. Mrs. Hansen (kindergarten teacher), Ms. Klann (first-grade teacher), and Mrs. Schmunk (Special Education Intensive Resource teacher) worked together with regular-education students and families to increase understanding and to establish the development of positive attitudes regarding integration.

Through a series of carefully implemented activities, severely-handicapped students participated in regular activities: assemblies, lunchroom, playground, library, music, and kindergarten programs for increased portions of each school day. The "Big Friend" program, in which nonhandicapped children functioned as peer tutors and models in classrooms for severely/profoundly-handicapped children, established school-family spirit among students, an appreciation for individual differences and the interdependence of mankind, and increased self-esteem among all students.

Severely handicapped children who had previously lacked communication skills began to develop more appropriate speech patterns. Parents of all students expressed pleasure in having their children exposed to an integrated setting, citing important developments in positive attitudes toward themselves and others.

Phase IV, 1988–1989:

Increased Integration and "Teaming" Among Regular and Support Staff

When another group of severely handicapped children was moved to Badger Elementary School, two additional first-grade classes of regular education students were enrolled from the military community. Teachers, Ms. Hall and Ms. Ramsaur (with expertise in both regular and special education) and an additional kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Burgess, were welcome members to the instructional team.

In addition to the continued integration of regular/special needs students throughout the school, the entire staff worked closely with support staff, Mrs. Halderman (speech),

Mr. Walsworth (resource) and Mrs. File (reading), to develop a support system designed to better serve mildly handicapped (learning-disabled and language-disabled children). Instructional units were planned by all staff members to insure continuity of program support for each child, to reduce fragmentation of instructional delivery, and to integrate speaking, reading, and writing into a double- and triple-dose instructional format.

In order to provide team-planning time for the instructional staff, the school principal developed a program which allowed all students to move through enrichment centers for a portion of each Friday afternoon. While teachers planned together, the school principal, librarian, and break-aide (whose weekly time allocation was combined into one block) orchestrated round-robin enrichment activities in drama, stories, poetry, art, social studies, science, and integrated language experiences.

Phase V, 1989–1990: Desegregation of Severely Handicapped Students and Implementation of Integrated Resource Classroom Model Completed

When the last class of severely/profoundly handicapped students moved to the new Joy Elementary School, second-grade classrooms were added to Birch. Though we miss our very special students, we welcome our military students and staff, Mrs. Wallace and Mr. Ferringer, who have become active members of the Birch Elementary School instructional team.

Because of its student body, comprised of 146 children, Birch staff have continued to increase their energy toward the development of a schoolwide instructional program which is designed to

- provide appropriate early childhood instructional programs to all students (ages five through eight years).
- increase self-esteem, develop responsible behavior, and establish a love of learning.
- provide intervention services to a high number of "at risk" students and families.

To achieve these goals, weekly team planning sessions have been extended which focus upon specific areas. Some of these areas include development of assessment strategies/tools, mentorship/staff support and shared expertise to building team members, intervention strategy development (schoolwide, grade level, and individual student), and integrated support-service planning.

In addition to clearly defined staff planning sessions, the integration of support staff program delivery within the regular classroom setting has been successfully completed. Regular and support staff work together in classrooms during two-hour daily instructional time blocks. This provides a reduced pupil-teacher ratio within the regular classroom, reduces risks of diminishing self-esteem caused by ability grouping (tracking) or pull-out delivery models, and provides opportunities for increased learning through cooperative interaction among staff and students alike. Since no group operates in isolation, staff cooperation has increased, student behaviors indicate a belief that learning is fun, parents have become more involved, and changes related to program improvement (such as integration of language arts) have become a natural, ongoing, exciting process.

Conclusion

Birch Elementary School staff are pleased to have had the opportunity to act as catalysts in improving quality educational experiences for all children. Although we miss working with many of the intensive, special-needs students and their families, we take great pride in a continued commitment to provide appropriate educational opportunities to young, military-dependent children in the security of a small, close-knit family/community school setting.

New Ways To Deliver Vocational Skills

Rocke McFarland
Nightmute, Alaska

The district regional school board mandated a program in 1987 to deliver vocational skills to students from rural villages, skills which could not otherwise be taught because of the small, isolated nature of the schools. These skills were to complement the low-impact, subsistence lifestyle of the Yup'ik Eskimo population of the Kuskokwim Delta. Some 26 village schools with over 2,600 students exist in this distinct district, the total area of which is 44,000 square miles. English is the second language; Yup'ik Eskimo is the native language.

Our summer Youth Employment and Training Program evolved from the board's mandate; I was fortunate enough to be instrumental in the research, design, and running of that program as a summer principal for the first two years. At that time I was finishing my principal's internship. In fact, the program was the direct result of my internship.

This proactive program has been in existence for four years and has received national as well as statewide recognition: Presentations of the program's parameters were well received at the 1988 State of Alaska Youth At Risk Conference and at the 1989 Northwest Regional Private Industry Council Conference. However, and more important than recognition, the program saves kids by helping them make sense out of a changing world.

After intensive research in 1987, I devised a program which flew district students (through age 22) into Bethel, Alaska, to be housed in the dormitory of the University of Alaska, Kuskokwim Branch for a six-week program involving half a day of intensive study in vocational education and half a day of work. Classes are team taught by two specialists, one in the vocational study area, the other a reading specialist. The reading-literacy specialists frequently have special-education credentials. During the remaining half of the day when not in class, students work with an employer in Bethel in an area as closely related to the vocational study area as is possible. Again, students who are in class in the morning are at work in the afternoon and vice versa. Each class is presented once in the morning and once in the afternoon. This allows an extremely low pupil-teacher ration of six to one in many classes.

Additional components of the program have shaped it into a comprehensive sun-up until bedtime effort. For example, an elaborate recreation program with five separate stations including games such as cards and chess in the dormitory—and basketball and archery elsewhere is in place from six-thirty in the evening until study time at nine-thirty. Junior counselors, selected from successful, returning college freshman and sophomores, are trained in special education and crisis intervention basics. These junior counselors coupled with certificated staff provide a supervisory ratio of one to five in the evenings. As an indicator of the evolutionary nature of the program, in its second year the junior counselors lived with the students in townhouse apartments as well as in the dormitory, serving as constant role models and genuine friends.

External leadership training proved helpful. Several specialized leadership training experts were brought in. The first week of the program is devoted exclusively to leadership skills and group-cohesion building exercises which turn an amorphous, shy group of Yup'ik Eskimo students from small villages into a homogeneous working unit. Equal emphasis is given to Native and Western leadership skills.

This summer will be the fourth summer of the program. Though I am now the principal of my own small school of 44 students in Nightmute, I still feel an intense kinship, perhaps even an ownership, of the Bethel-based program which I essentially fathered and brought to fruition.

Community Involvement: A Common Challenge

Pam VanWechel
Kotzebue, Alaska

Administrators across the state of Alaska share a common challenge in their efforts to involve parents and other community members in school affairs. The concept of local control is fiercely defended by school boards and administrators but, in practice, involvement is difficult to obtain.

Seeking the opinions of parents and hearing the concerns of the community are important components in maintaining local control for Alaskan communities. Administrators who are truly concerned about community involvement may benefit by a step-by-step strategy which has brought forward results in communities as large as Ketchikan (2,500 students) and as small as Ambler (100 students).

If you believe that parents and other community members are the best judges of what should be happening in schools, share that philosophy with the people that you work with.

1. Establish committees or task forces only when a specific goal or certain objectives are to be reached. Clearly define the goals for the group, and communicate the goals or objectives in writing.
2. Call in people who are sincerely interested, and ask them to take on tasks that are important and interesting to them. Let them know that local control of public schools means participation by parents and other adults who care about the young people in the community.
3. Encourage volunteer workers by providing secretarial support services (i.e., typing, running copies, sending out announcements, and taking notes on meetings) when necessary. Use your volunteers as resources, and not as a free labor force.
4. Determine a mutually agreeable time and place for meetings, and set up a regular schedule so everyone knows when and where meetings take place. Start meetings on time and limit the meeting time to one hour.

5. A **very** brief synopsis of progress should be written about each meeting. These need not necessarily be minutes, but should delineate high points and note goals or assignments for the next meeting.

6. When members are absent, send out the meeting synopsis and any materials that were shared at the meeting. Keep people informed so they will be comfortable coming back into the group. Alert them of the next meeting and denote upcoming business.

7. Meetings should be announced in personal mailings to all members. As active committee people mention the names of other individuals who should be included, add their names and alert them to the next two meetings. Continue mailings if they indicate an interest or start coming to the meetings.

8. Keep all members on a mailing list, and don't drop anyone unless they ask. Involvement is voluntary, and members should share their time and talents because they **want** to, not because they are obligated to the group.

9. Reinforce involvement by providing documentation of successes or by producing completed documents with contributors names included. Remember that adults look to a product that will validate their progress toward goals.

10. When the goals or objectives of a group have been reached, compliment members and say "Thank you." Dissolve the committee when tasks have been completed.

11. Only ask committees or task forces to do those tasks that they are capable of doing. Only ask for recommendations if you sincerely *want* them and intend to **act** on them. **Only** ask for a person's opinion when you sincerely want to hear it. It may be different from your own.

Attention to the points noted above will maximize an administrator's efforts to involve the community in school affairs. The task will be challenging, but you will know you've done your part to gather parent input and gain community support.

Writing and Reading Instruction

K. Timothy Cline
Koyukuk, Alaska

Much of what can be said about principal/teachers all over Alaska is true in my job as well. My role as a principal/teacher at Koyukuk School is not unique in Alaska. I have the responsibility of being the instructional leader for this school and I teach grades 4 through 10. As principal, I believe in keeping up with current literature about what works in education and as a teacher, I adapt what I learn to meet the needs of my students.

There are a couple highlights which I gladly share. Mind you, I have no new tricks to share, no "cure alls" to solve all the problems we as educators face in rural Alaska, but what I can share are ideas that are working in Koyukuk, Alaska, and might just work for you.

These ideas are simple and yet I feel they are the key to the successes we experience. They are the core of our writing and reading curriculum in Koyukuk.

The past three years, I have been very involved in the APEL project at my school. APEL (Academic Proficiency in the English Language) is a federally funded grant for bilingual education in our district and is a computer-supported writing curriculum for grades 4 through 12. The emphasis is on teaching writing as a process and using the computers as a means of motivating the students. In fact, APEL synthesizes three well-validated instructional approaches: teaching writing as a process, computer-supported instruction, and linguistic contrastive analysis.

In teaching writing as a process the focus of our teaching in Koyukuk is on students' writing. Therefore, grammar books, although important, are put in their proper place and used only as a tool for editing. Students work within the context of their writing. Along with the grammar books, the skill and drill work which can often take up so much of the school day is given a back seat, thus allowing even more time to do real writing. The results have been exciting. Students now have genuine interest in what they are writing about. Student peer editing groups have replaced our red pens and our students are actively learning to write rather than passively listening to teachers.

The use of computers has added to positively motivate my class. Much of the students' writing, both individually and in groups, is done on the computer using a program called The Alaska Writing Machine. The Alaska Writing Machine was

developed as part of the APEL project which is a whole writing curriculum for grades 4 through 12 and is soundly based using the model of the Alaska Writing Project. The once cumbersome task of revision is now simply a matter of deleting or inserting words, phrases, and paragraphs and is fun to do.

I have learned that being able to really empower children with writing requires that they be committed to and excited about their own work. The students in our school are excited about their writing.

In addition to our writing curriculum, we have committed a great deal of time to motivating our students to read **real, whole books**. Our school is participating in a districtwide reading incentive program which rewards children for reading books outside the classroom. The more books they read, the better rewards they receive. Students were definitely motivated, so I researched the apparent success of this program by looking at the reading test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, grades three through six, district wide. The results showed that a statistically significant gain in test scores was due to our adding the reading incentive program to our district. In my own school, we tracked each student's progress and offered encouragement throughout the year. As a result, our school of 27 students in 1988–1989 read a total of 1,557 books. Already this school year, the students have topped 1,563 books on their way to this year's goal of 2,500 books.

The success of the River Readers program for the children in kindergarten through second grade has relied a great deal on parent involvement at home. The parents are asked to read to those who can't yet read and listen to those who have developed the skills. Either way, the reading is followed up with a simple questionnaire to help the children summarize the story. This paper needs to be signed by the parent after the summary is complete.

The students in upper grades read on their own and, when they have completed a book, have a variety of ways to be held accountable. They can choose to write a traditional book report, or use a computer program called Electronic Bookshelf. Just about anything a student wants to do to meet this requirement can be worked out between the student and his teacher. The emphasis is on motivating the children to read, not discouraging them by making the accountability cumbersome.

Students are free to choose their own books from the library. We encourage reading books at grade level but this is not a requirement. If they choose to read a book far below their level, the teacher may only give them partial credit or half a book credit for their effort. Most of the kids start the year by reading all the books that are part of the Battle of the Books program and then move on to other like material.

The Paint Bucket Battle, and What I Learned

Rod Pruitt
Juneau, Alaska

I regarded the incident with Howard as an academic case study in rural sociology. It was important to perceive the matter in this light because had I allowed my emotional side to take over, I would have run up and down the boardwalk flapping my arms like a loon. Instead, I squeezed my chin calmly and quizically as I watched Howard wave a fistful a rusty halibut hooks over his head as he bellowed warnings about the impact on public safety concerning the careless disposal of hazardous material. Let me explain.

Howard was my 17-year-old ninth grader. He and nine others comprised my K-11 rural school student body. Howard was an imposing figure with his huge frame and shock of curly red hair. Generally he was a likeable fellow and we got on quite amenably. However, experience cautioned me against expecting the sun to set on our tranquility.

During my four years as principal/teacher I came to learn that Howard was not usually the author of his own behavioral pirouettes. His parents were in fact the covert agents who generally penned the problems. I'll never be certain why Howard's parents perceived the school with suspicion, but there was no question that a clear and direct correlation existed between Howard's periods of erratic behavior, and my attempts to extend to him a helping hand beyond providing him a place to sit and a book to look at. Perhaps it was due to years of being heckled by social workers and bill collectors that caused the family to recoil at my efforts to develop special programs for Howard. I was to them quite possibly just another no-good-do-gooder. Hmmm, a chilling concept.

There was no chance at all that Howard could have earned a regular high-school diploma; he simply didn't have what it takes. Unfortunately, his parents insisted that he was going to graduate and join the Coast Guard. Despite my efforts to show them that this was not a viable option they tenaciously imposed the notion on Howard. The kid was confused.

Although Howard was 17, he had never held a job. Part-time fishing aboard his parents' rickety hand troller was as close as he had come to employment. He never seemed to have a dime in his pocket. So, I extended to Howard his first chance at a few

dollars on a regular basis. I offered him a position at the school as assistant custodian in charge of burning the school trash twice weekly. Given Howard's nonexistant work habits I knew it'd be tough, but I hoped that he would come to appreciate having 84 dollars a month flow through his pockets. Further, I had delusions that he would like it so much he might ask for additional time and tasks. I was delighted when he enthusiastically accepted my offer. I signed him on as a district employee; application form, resumé, W-2, the formal tour.

For a couple of months the arrangement worked well. Howard was in cigarettes, soda pop, and burgers at LeeAnn's Troll Inn. He was showing up on time and he enjoyed having a job title. Super!

One day after school two of my primary kids traipsed into the classroom covered from head to heel with copper paint—the kind used on boat bottoms. Understanding cuprous oxide for what it is, I quickly scrubbed the kids and then sought out the source of the paint. I located it adjacent the grid; a timbered structure driven into the beach and used with the tide to allow temporary drydocking of small craft. The grid was about 100 feet from the classroom door. I wasn't at all surprised at the buckets and brushes I found there. Because they are convenient, it seems that the weeds beside grids are often the preferred places to dispose of such things.

About this time I saw Howard cruising the boardwalk and I called him over.

"What's up Mr. P.?"

"Howard, Greta and Ernestine painted each other with this stuff. I cleaned them up but we need to get these cans and brushes out of here right away. You know how dangerous copper paint can be." Howard nodded knowingly. "Take care of these things along with our school trash; tack on a little extra custodial time if you'd like."

"Hey, no problem, I'll get to it on my way back from the store."

I wasn't at all mortified when the next morning I discovered that Howard hadn't done the job. He was a tough kid to get moving no matter what the task. In any event, I had examined the labels on the paint cans and determined that the active ingredients were in fact nontoxic. The issue to my mind was no longer one of child poisoning; instead it was an opportunity to give Howard the responsibility of performing a highly important task. It was a personal growth thing by this time. When Howard walked into the room I said, "The cans are still there, Howard. C'mon now, we shouldn't fool around with this job."

"Oh yeah! I forgot. I'll get 'em at lunch time."

"Terrific. Get to them before any more kids do."

Howard returned from lunch. The cans were still there.

"What's going on Howard? Look, this is important, Don't go home after school until you've removed these cans and brushes, okay?"

Howard seemed pensive. He muttered something or other, but at least his head bobbed slightly. Forboding forces were stirring.

Sure enough, after school Howard slipped around the corner of the building and scampered for home before I could catch him. Yes, something was up for sure. I hated it. I fretted the night through and waited patiently for Howard the next morning. When he entered the room, one glance convinced me that, yes, a squall was waxing.

"Want to tell me what's going on Howard?"

He scuffed his sneakers slowly back and forth across the carpet, arms folded, eyes cast downward. Eventually he mumbled.

"How come I have to do it?"

I held my ground intrepidly.

"Howard, you're a member of my custodial staff. Removing those cans and brushes is something I insist you do... yesterday! What in the world is the problem?"

Howard's face reddened. Actually I admired his pending resolve but I was losing patience. He paused, martialed his gumption, and said, "Those cans are on private property, and I shouldn't be made to break the law."

I was floored. However, I knew then just where the trouble was coming from. I etched a mental line and pressed my position.

"Howard, we have both been here a long time. We know that no one gives a hoot about that patch of grass. No one in this village could tell us who owns it for that matter. But I don't care anything about those things. I want the cans out of there by lunch time no matter if the Queen of England owns the property."

My attempt to lighten the situation with a little social studies didn't impress Howard. He retorted, "Dad says you don't have the right to make me do it. I'm not supposed to go on private property."

That was it! The drama was cast.

"Howard, here's the scoop. You let me worry about the property issue. I will assume complete responsibility. The cans are a hazard to the health of the school children, and any other living thing for that matter. I am certain that the grid area is public land, but I am not going to quibble with you over it. Howard, if the cans are still there when you go home after school today, you will lose your job. You are my employee, and if you want to keep working for the school you'll do as you are asked here. Call your dad if you'd like; let him know your situation."

I'll close the circle quickly. Howard's dad sacrificed Howard's job in order to spite the assistant custodian program. The dad persisted in counseling Howard to balk at my instructions to remove the cans and brushes. I relieved Howard of his duties; I fired him. The classroom door registered six on the Richter scale as Howard bolted for home. I moved the cans myself. The job took about six minutes. The dad flew into a rage. He called every agency imaginable, from the Governor's Office to the Labor Relations Board. He wailed to my district superintendent. He went on for weeks. Although he received no satisfaction he eventually cooled down.

On a crisp spring day about three months later, the kids had gone home and I was locking the school doors. I was startled when I saw Howard's sister shouting frantically as she ran up the boardwalk toward me. I could make out the words, "King's hurt. King's hurt."

King is my son's golden retriever. I looked beyond Howard's sister and saw a clutch of kids bent over the dog lying in the grass beside the grid not two feet from the scene of the paint bucket crime. I started toward them. About half way there I saw Howard raise up with a wad of halibut hooks dangling from his curled fingers. He saw me coming and thrust his hand triumphantly skyward. I realized from the mood of the group that the crisis had passed. I slowed my pace in order to hear what Howard was saying.

"Mr. P., your dog got a hook in his paw. He's okay, I got it out."

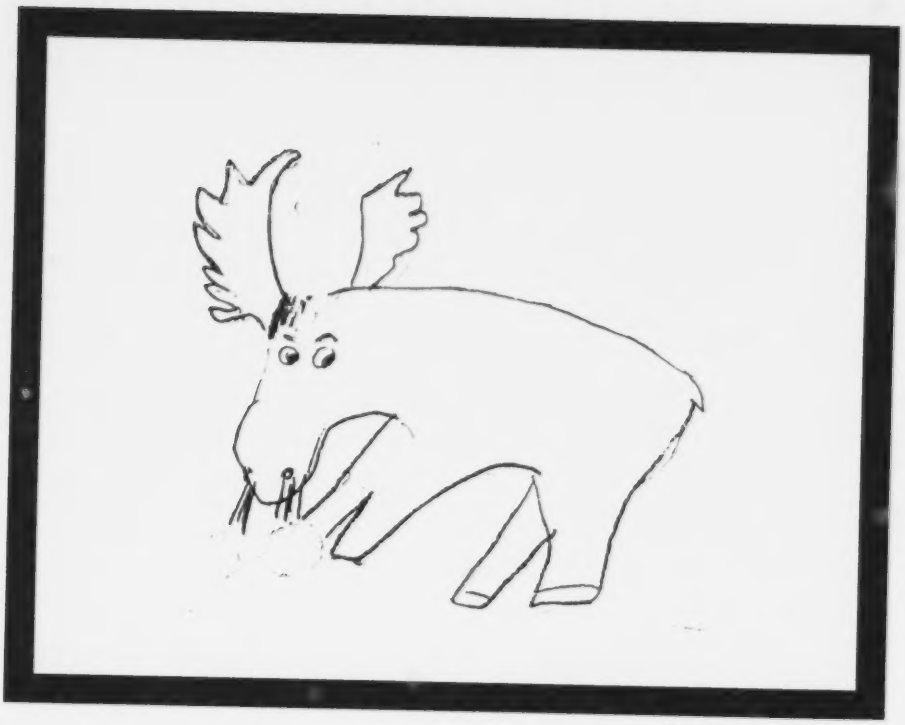
I was relieved. I waved to him and said, "Great! You saved the day Howard. King loves you."

As Howard and I gazed at one another he remarked loudly, "You'd better get someone down here to take this old halibut gear away. These kids could get hooks in their hands or their eyes. They're bad. I know because I ran one through my hand on my dad's boat once."

Howard was missing the message; that was the sad part. Ironically, he was afforded the opportunity to act as a keeper of public safety. That was the happy part. Of course, Howard's dad found no reason to protest this instance of trespassing which begs the question as to what his motives were in waging the war of the paint cans.

Upon reflection I have deduced that it was a case of folks not wanting what they don't ask for; no matter what the sacrifice. My offering to Howard a job as custodian was viewed by his family as an infringement of some sense of privacy; like an invasion of well-meaning welfare workers. The thesis here is embarassingly simple; however, it is not to be regarded lightly. Know when to give. Don't let interpretation of need overrule

sociological objectivity. Many well-intentioned missionaries have run roughshod over this basic concept.



Only In Alaska!

Dennis Dempsey
Homer, Alaska

There is no question that being a school principal in Alaska brings challenges that are unique to this state. Stories of bears chasing your runners off the cross-country trail or of moose bedding down under your office window won't even raise an eyebrow when bantered around a table of administrators in Alaska. Yet, the one item that is constantly challenging school principals is the combination of weather, distance, and natural disasters that impede one's process in operating a school or a sport program. What follows is a minor example of what I mean.

The phone rang early one school morning. I stirred from a sound sleep and looked with bleary eyes at a clock that was flashing five. I groaned to myself as I rolled out of bed. Who the heck was calling me at this time of the morning? The phone was answered on the fourth ring. It was Diane. "Did you see that lightning storm and hear that thunder?" My mind recalled midwest thunderstorms, but I have never seen one in Alaska, let alone in February. She said, "Didn't you know Mt. Redoubt blew again and all the ash is coming this way?" The conversation continued about whom to call and when to call them and of concerns of whether or not we will have school. I hung up with the terrible feeling that it was going to be one of those days.

I looked outside to find ash falling like heavy snow and knew we wouldn't have school. However, we had to wait until the superintendent announced the closure. We listened to the radio until the boss was interviewed via phone at his Kenai home. It was quite obvious that he had just awakened, but he handled the situation with great aplomb. School closure or any delays would be announced in one hour. At that point I figured it was time to get on the phone to my staff. I called my assistant to have him notify the classified staff about the situation. I started the process with the certified staff. I just wish I could have taped the conversations that morning with all the staff involved; it was a howl. There is nothing more amusing than talking to people who are half asleep on the phone. By the time I had finished calling all 30 staff members and assorted fellow principals, the radio announced the school closure for the day. This meant another phone call to my athletic director to make sure he called Palmer High School to cancel our

volleyball match for that night, so they didn't travel six hours to Homer. With all this done, it was time to relax.

Hey not bad, a quiet day at home! I could use a day off. I should have known better! Within the next hour I answered the phone 50 times concerning school closure. I kept asking myself whether anyone ever listens to the radio or reads those bloody memos we mail out every year. I finally decided that I would take the phone off the hook and join the rest of my family who had slept through most of the last three hours. Ah, no phone calls, just silence. I fell asleep, trying to make up for the last two hours just spent on the phone. Yet, it was not 30 minutes later when I was awakened by a knock on the door. I thought "Who in the hell is at the door when there is no school and ash is falling everywhere?" I struggled down the stairs half asleep and was met by one of my students, as a matter of fact, our valedictorian. I guess being academically successful doesn't always mean you have gained the same degree of common sense. He had driven through the ash to see if there was any way to get the recommendation a teacher had written for him so he could mail it today for a scholarship. I sent him away, telling him to get a custodian at school to let him in and not to panic, because the mail wasn't going anywhere today! I crawled back into bed to finish my disrupted sleep pattern, to be awakened 15 minutes later by the same student. He couldn't get into the school to get the materials and asked if I could help him. At this point it was quite obvious that any ideas of a restful sleep were shot. So I got dressed, drove over to school, and found the needed papers. I rushed right home in hopes of at least a few more minutes of quiet before my own troops awoke, but it was not to be.

After enjoying a rousing breakfast, I decided maybe this was a good time to work on my taxes. After 10 minutes of quiet work, my efforts were interrupted by the din of the phone. "Who put the phone back on the hook?" I groused as I was called to the phone by one of my daughters. On the phone was a member of the ski team wanting to know when they would be leaving for the regional ski meet in Wasilla. Oh **no**! I had forgotten all about them leaving today on a bus. What to do? The buses weren't running and I was sure the planes weren't flying, at least until the ash settled. I once again called my athletic director and we decided to meet with the ski coach at the high school. I trudged over to school, figuring it was definitely time to punt.

I thought maybe I could call and arrange for our activity bus to leave after school. At least this way people couldn't get too excited about sending the team, since it wouldn't leave until after school. The bus supervisor agreed when I called, and we were ready to start the next round of calls to the kids to make trip arrangements. On my way to make the calls, I had this strange thought that maybe, just maybe, I should double-check all this

with the boss! I figured it was not a big deal. I was sure he would say yes. Wrong again! The boss didn't think it was a real good idea for an athletic team to be traveling in a school bus through the ash on a day that school had been cancelled. But if I could arrange for them to fly to Anchorage, it was fine for the bus driver to take the bus up by himself to Anchorage to meet the kids. Well, this started the next round of calls to the airlines. Of course no flights were leaving the ground until later that night. So I booked 20 athletes and coaches on the twin engine Convair and sent the bus driver on his way to Anchorage. I should have known things were going too well, when she ended our conversation by saying to make sure to call back at five P.M. just in case the flight was cancelled.

A new round of calls was made to the kids to make arrangements to get on the plane. Phew! Maybe I can go home now. Just as I was leaving the office, the boys' basketball coach came walking down the hall. I think to myself, "Why on earth is he here?" The answer wasn't long in coming, and soon we were on our way to the gym. Ash had been sucked in to the ventilation system before the blowers could be turned off. This meant that we now had a sixteenth of an inch of ash spread over our gym floor. With no custodians around, we would have to seal off the gym until the next day when floor would be cleaned some way without taking off the sealant. What next, I thought.

I drove home and immediately found out that my boss had called again. I called back to find that he was faxing down the emergency procedures to be broadcast over the radio stations and to be given to all the students. Yes, you guessed it. It meant another trip back to school in the dust, and copies delivered around town.

The dust was settling and I felt good about the prospects of our team getting out on the plane. I told my wife my itinerary just in case anything else happened. I headed down the bluff to our local public radio station. As I entered the door I was greeted by a sign telling me to call home immediately. Now what? My wife said that the airlines called and needed to talk to me right away. I called, knowing for sure they had cancelled the evening flight. "Mr. Dempsey, I'm sorry, but all flights have been cancelled tonight. Could we help you tomorrow?" There were not a whole lot of options. The bus might have been able to leave early the next morning, but it was already gone. I said, "Yes, please book us on the earliest flight the next morning," in hopes of getting the kids to the meet on time. "No problem," rang through the phone line. Then a pause and a sigh at the other end of the phone. "Mr. Dempsey, we will have to send the kids on two separate flights, one at six and the other at eight." "That's great," I said, "whatever it takes to get the kids there in time." I finished by saying I would call them back with the people who would be assigned to each flight. Here we go again. I headed back to my house and started the next round of calls. I told the coaches to decide who was going on which flight and that I

would call them back in 15 minutes. I headed off to continue my deliveries to the other principals. I borrowed the phone at the second house to call the coaches and, in turn, call the airline. The new plan called for the girls to be on the early flight and the boys the late flight. Check-in times were set and pickup arrangements were made. Phew! At least that was taken care of!

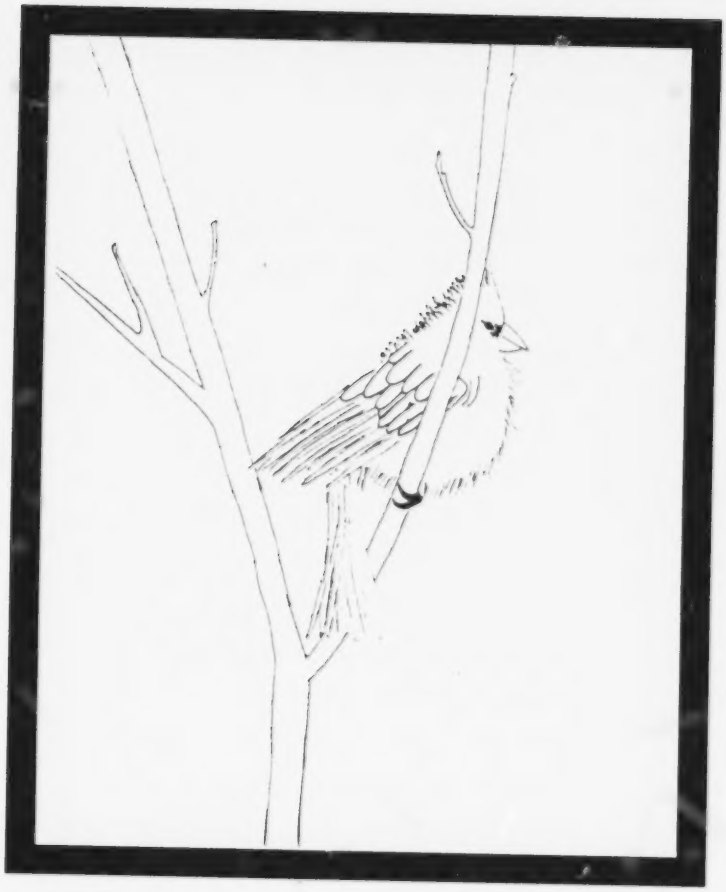
I continued on my deliveries to my fellow principals and the other radio station in town. I was no longer in a rush and actually had some fun stopping at each of my peers' houses. I was just sitting down for a cup of tea at my last house when the phone rang. I joked, saying that I'm glad I'm not the only one getting calls today. Yet, as Murphy knew years ago, the call was for me. My wife called to say the airlines had called again and said that I needed to call back right away. "I'm sorry, Mr. Dempsey, but we have arranged for an extra plane to fly down to Homer tomorrow at six. So all of your kids can leave at the same time. I hope this will help the situation?" I laughed, knowing there wasn't much I could say except yes. Once again another round of calls to coaches. Make sure all of your kids are at the airport at five-fifteen tomorrow. But don't let anyone leave his house until he hears from me. By now I was getting smart. I would call the airlines at four forty-five A.M. to make sure they were flying and then call the team members and coaches. Hopefully, this would save all of them a trip to the airport if the planes weren't flying. Unfortunately they would all have to be up by four-thirty either way. I was sure the parents must think I was losing my mind.

Things were looking good! It was already seven-thirty and I was finally on my way home. Oh no! The bus driver. I wondered how long he had been sitting at the airport in Anchorage or if he even had made it through the snow. I made yet another call to my athletic director to let him know what was happening and have him make sure the bus would be at the Anchorage airport by seven tomorrow morning.

Dinner was quick and I figured I had better hit the sack early! My early morning phone call sequence wasn't far off. I was feeling good about the kids getting out and arriving at the region meet in time. The volcano had stopped steaming and the weather forecast was for snow. Sleep came restlessly and seemed nonexistent when the alarm rang the next morning. A quick shower and on to the phones! I knew my karma had to be better today. I dialed the local airport office, but no one answered. That's okay, they just aren't there yet. I called the Anchorage office to see the status of the flights. I sat listening to some elevator music as I was waiting for a receptionist on the other end of the phone. "Mr. Dempsey, all the flights have been cancelled until further notice! Could I reassign your team on another flight?" Now what??? I left by saying, "No thanks," and figured if

school was open today we'll just have to send the kids up on the volleyball bus. They will miss the first day of the region ski meet. Boy, that ought to make the parents happy.

I began the next round of calls to coaches and kids and then a quick trip to school. I figured since I was already up, I might as well get some work done while it was quiet. Later that day, all the kids were loaded on the bus and I gave instructions to the driver where to meet our other bus that had been sitting empty in Anchorage for 24 hours. A word of encouragement to the kids and they were ready to go. The coach walked up and sighed with relief that they were going to at least get to race on Saturday. As he stepped on the bus he turned around and asked me, "What happens if the volcano goes off while we're in Anchorage?" I was laughing out loud trying to respond as he looked at me as if I needed some immediate medical treatment. I yelled back "Just stay there until the state meet. At least you will be there on time!" He smiled. As I turned around I spotted a moose foraging for food in the parking lot. Only in Alaska, I thought, only in Alaska!



Teachers and Politics in Rural Villages

Joseph I. Slats
Chevak, Alaska

Teachers going into a rural Alaska village should bear in mind that they are guests of the community and of the culture. One area of village life which should be respected and better understood by guests is village politics.

We, as Americans, are accustomed to exercising freedom of speech to express our views and opinions to the decision-making entities. A village is different from other communities in some ways which require that a guest coming in think twice about how his or her actions might affect the village. One is that the community is one big family. Each person is related to each other person in some way, whether it is directly by blood or in other subtle ways not found in the Western world. These relationships often have much to do with how people act toward one another. Another difference is that decisions by leaders in the past were aimed toward the good of the whole as opposed to personal gain for one individual.

Political interference may come in the form of the attempt by guests to influence and persuade members of decision-making bodies to their way of thinking. The individuals may feel that they are helping the people by sharing their expertise and experience, and this is generally welcomed by the community. An individual may also feel that the decision being made has a direct effect on him or her, so he should be able to express an opinion. Perhaps the issue has to do with the school, and a teacher or administrator feels strongly about how things should be done. The problem arises when, instead of merely expressing a point of view and allowing the community to make a decision, the individual tries to sway village decision makers for personal reason. When teachers or administrators influence how decision makers should decide, vote, or carry on the discussion, then a line is crossed in terms of respect for the community and the culture.

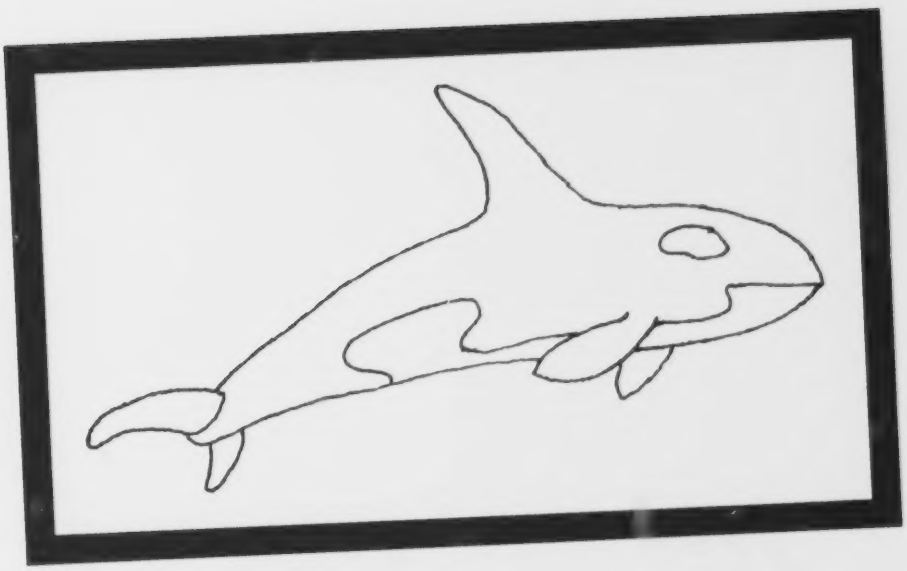
The consequences to the village and its fragile and subtle individual relationships can be severe. A board or council election or difference of opinion on issues can quickly escalate into a long-term battle when subjected to outside influences. Villagers may choose sides on a basis other than what the original issues were, with the result that the community is split, with relative turning against relative. Lines of communication within

the village may shut down completely. Elders and other community members become victims of a system which is not theirs to begin with. When this type of situation occurs, it is a real tragedy, and it may take years and years to even begin the healing process.

Guests coming into a village setting should avoid the political arena. The possible consequences of not doing so are too great for those who will be remaining in the village for years or generations to come. Teachers and administrators will be moving on eventually, leaving the community to deal with what they leave behind. Not only community members pay the price, however. Future teachers and administrators coming into the village may also suffer from actions of their predecessors.

VIEWPOINTS

PART TWO



Larson States Alaska's Concern

Peter Larson
Homer, Alaska
Reprinted from Totem Tales, December 1987

I have a concern! My concern relates to attracting and retaining excellent teachers. This concern is heightened when faced with declining revenues and a reduction in teacher incentives which require a monetary commitment. Why this concern? Consider the following facts and their implication for Alaska:

- C. E. Feistritzer (1983) who conducted a national study of teaching, reports that fewer than 5% of the full-time college freshmen in 1980 chose teaching as a probable career as compared to 19% in 1970.
- College and university students with the highest academic rankings are showing less interest in becoming teachers than did similar students 10 years ago. Further, Vance and Schlechby (1982) indicate that students entering teaching in the 1980s have significantly lower college entrance scores. Reasons given for this generally center upon the fact that the profession lacks validation from the public. In addition, there is little prestige in teaching, and there are limited career options in the educational field. This is seen both through nonsupport by the general public and low salaries. Many teachers have to maintain two jobs in order to make ends meet.
- Due to a teacher shortage in much of the nation (projected to reach 1.5 million by 1990), many school districts are raising teacher pay and actively recruiting. Noteworthy among these changes took place in Rochester, New York, where pay for beginning teachers jumped from $18,983 to $28,935 in 1989–1990 and experienced teachers rose 40% from $32,651 to $45,774. Top teachers (called lead teachers) will earn $70,000.
- Much of the incentive for teachers to come to Alaska has been high salaries and, to some extent, the exoticness of Alaska. We may continue to attract teachers due to the latter, but when this aura wears off in one or two years, they will again seek warmer climates because the salaries are not commensurately high compared to the other states.
- The state of education has attracted national attention to the point that it has become a political issue in the presidential race. Although somewhat

split on the hows of curing the woes of education, all candidates are concerned. Why? Because, according to the *Christian Science Monitor*, public schools have become a major concern among Americans.

- The present lure of the Outside is increasing. Teachers, disillusioned with salaries, lack of validation from the Alaska public, and the general working environment in Alaska are looking toward warmer climates, closer proximity to relatives, more educational opportunities for themselves as well as their own children, more varied cultural opportunities, and, now, the higher salaries and other attractive benefits being offered by Lower 48 school districts.
- William Montague recently wrote in *Christian Science Monitor*, "Increasingly concerned with their need for skilled workers, American manufacturing and corporate leaders are taking a harder look at the quality of region's schools in deciding where to locate facilities."

Studies show that ". . . business leaders care more about locating in areas that have laid strong foundations for long-term economic growth than they do about short-term incentives" (Sol Hurwitz, Senior Vice-President of the Committee for Economic Development). He went on to say that, "corporate leaders see **education** as the cornerstone of that foundation."

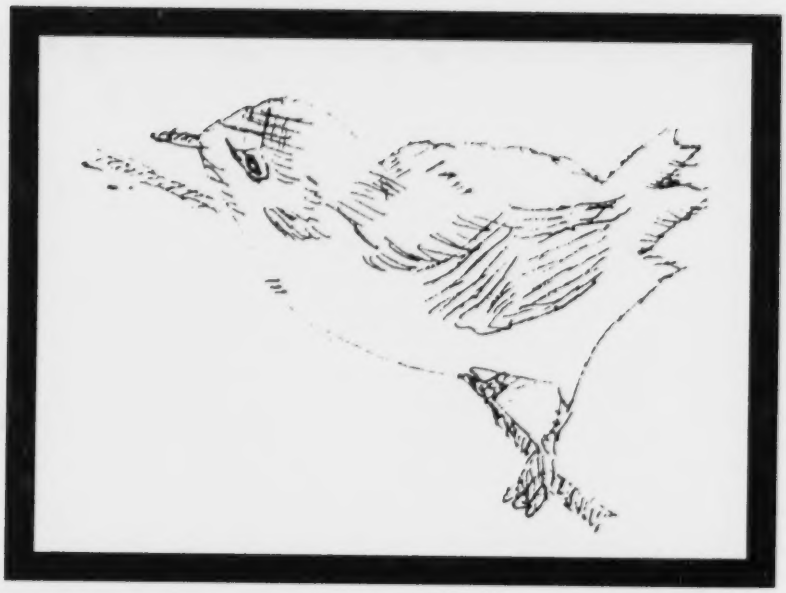
The cumulative effect of the above points will have a deleterious effect upon education specifically. In a more general sense they will have grave effects on the economy of Alaska and its ability to become more competitive in the industrial sector. According to Marilyn Block, an associate with the consulting firm of John Naisbett, author of *Megatrends*, "In manufacturing, we as a nation don't really do much nowadays that can be handled by a low-skill work force and we'll do even less in the future." If the schools in Alaska are turning out unskilled graduates and the dropout rate is high, industry will not look to Alaska as a place to expand.

In order to ensure that Alaska remains competitive, it is imperative that Alaska retain the fine educators who are now here and attract new ones who are of equal caliber. There are ways in which this can be accomplished. I recommend the following:

- Work to maintain and raise present teachers' salaries or increase benefits so that the salaries and benefits are competitive (relatively) with the rest of the states.
- Write to your borough and state legislators and inform them of the above data. It may be an eye-opener for them.
- Promote legislation that will encourage our bright high-school students to enter the field of education. This can be fostered through the complete

forgiveness of educational debts if the student teaches for a period of time.

Legislators may see this as a Catch-22. That is, in order to have a good educational system and hence a stronger economy, more money will need to be allocated to education. However, since the economy is low there is no money available for education. I, for one, prefer to pay the price through additional taxes to maintain excellent schools rather than to pay for social programs for an uneducated and illiterate populace.



Alaska's Cold Causes President Jean Some Problems

Jean Kalish
Talkeetna, Alaska
Reprinted from Totem Tales, February 1989

Greetings from the Frigid North!!!

No school today so I thought I would spend the day here trying to find the top of my desk plus write to you since I have not done so for quite sometime. As you have heard on the national news the weather has not been pleasant. I have been spending my time trying to survive the best I can—boy am I tired of living so darn hard. It is such an effort to exist. Let me fill you in on the past two weeks of absolute chaos.

January 25:

Headed out for Tok for the District Basketball Tournament, 480 miles one way. We stopped in Nenana for about three hours and Fairbanks for a couple of hours before arriving in Tok after 15 hours on the road.

January 26: Tok, -62

To make a long story short, I blew my engine. A rod went through the bottom of the sucker so I had to order a new engine, leave the car in Tok, and bum rides between the motel and the school.

January 27: -30

A warm, balmy day. The second day of the tournament. Our girls lost and they were heartbroken. The boys won both today and yesterday.

January 28: Tok, -64

I am really getting stressed out feeling so much responsibility for 30 kids in this frigid weather. The kids are fine though, such a pleasure to see them totally oblivious to the danger of the temperature. Gesh!!!!!! The girls finished the tournament in third, the

boys took first and qualified for State. Cheerleaders won the cheerleading trophy and several individual awards. All and all things went well. I woke up with five cold sores on my lips. I think the stress showed up. I have figured out how everyone will get home. I will go with a family that came up to see the tournament.

January 29: Tok, -72

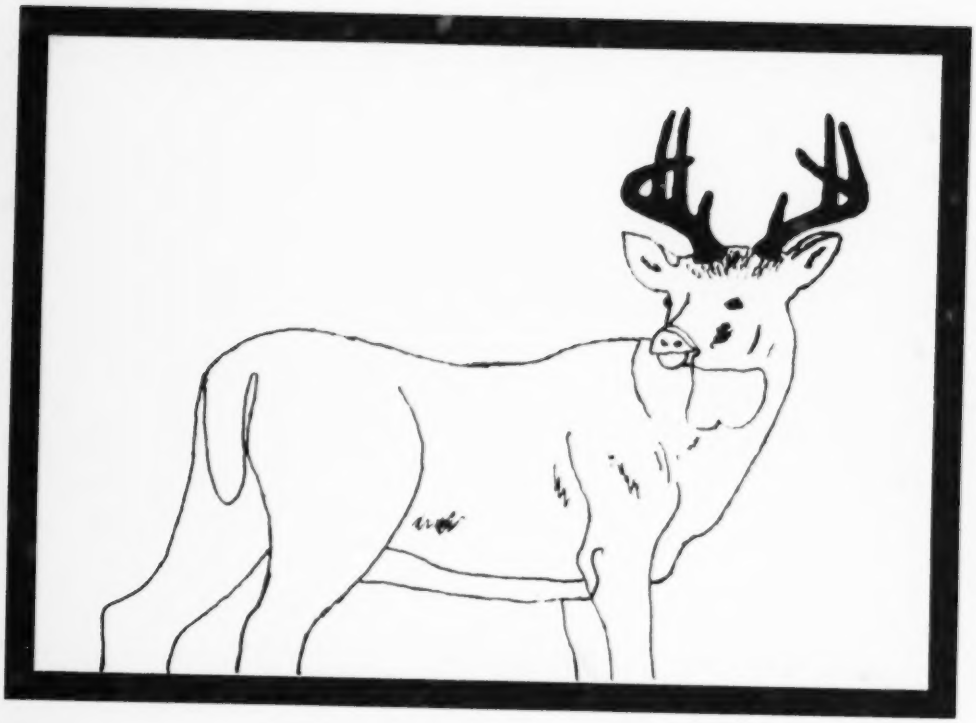
We hold the kids in Tok for two hours before leaving and then the bus caravans with two other schools. Safety in numbers, we hope. We only have to travel 150 miles without another vehicle in caravan and we think we are lucky. I leave with the family and get to Solberg's house at five-thirty P.M. The bus people call and I know where they are, know their every potty stop, and estimate their arrival time. I set up a telephone tree to let parents know when their little darlings should be arriving at school—ETA eleven-thirty P.M. I had loaned Bill's car to LesLee's mom, so that is why I got dropped off there. I plugged it in and took their pickup home to take my junk and see if my house survived. I am stupid enough to be thankful that I only have one frozen pipe. I get back to Solbergs and fire up Bill's car. (Bill is husband Bill Brannion, past President of AASSP, and now retired. Bill was in Washington at the time.) I brush the snow off, pat the car for starting, and go into the house.

Meanwhile, I ran into some parents and asked them to follow me so they could take Norm's pickup to school so I could go home and thaw pipes, and I wouldn't have to shuffle and drive back and forth delivering vehicles. They stop in and visit for a couple of minutes and, as they leave, I ask them to check to make sure Bill's car is still running. They come back 30 seconds later to ask calmly for a fire extinguisher, saying Bill's car is on fire. To summarize—the sucker burnt, melted, is 100% destroyed. Oh, heck, that's an exaggeration, the rear tires are o.k. and so is the jack. Not only was I dealing with the fire, but also LL's car was close by and I was afraid if the car blew, her car would too. Luckily, she had left the keys in it so I could unlock the steering wheel and shove it to the barn.

Speaking of the barn, there are eight horses there that can see the glow of the fire and hear the minibangs. They are starting to get nervous and I am hoping the car won't explode. But wait, if the horses are getting squirrely with the crackling of the car, what are they going to do when the fire engines come blaring up the road? I send someone to the highway to stop the lights and sirens. Ah, horses are o.k. and I have someone come to double-check. I say the heck with it and bum a ride home. Fire engines are still there making ice and steam, they don't need me—maybe I should check out the frozen pipe at the house. I arrive home, say screw the pipe, take a bath, and mix a drink.

Update Eagle (Eagle is Jean's Car)

Two-thousand dollars later, my car is repaired, and has been delivered to Fairbanks. I am now to Plan Z to get my car back here. It will work out eventually, I'm sure.



Rural Alaska Adjusts to New Educational Programs

Gene Dodd
Quinhagak, Alaska
Reprinted from Totem Tales, January 1984

In education, as it is with just about everything else in Alaska, it seems to me that there is a great lack of understanding on the part of the majority of Alaskans about the problems of the majority of Alaska. I thought this would be a good opportunity to share with the rest of you some of the problems we're facing in Quinhagak from the perspective I have gained during the past eight years spent working and living in Western Alaska.

Quinhagak is a Yupik-speaking Eskimo village of approximately 450 people located at the confluence of the Bering Sea and the Kanektok River about 400 miles west of Anchorage. It is important to remember that, while this may seem like a very small community to those of you from Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau, Quinhagak is one of the larger villages in Western Alaska. The Lower Kuskokwim School District, created in 1976 as a result of Senate Bill 35, had no presence in Quinhagak until 1979 when a new high school was opened. This was one of about 20 new high schools built within LKSD over a three-year period as a result of the Molly Hootch-Anna Tobeluk consent decree. Prior tc the 1982–1983 school year, the community requested that the Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary School be transferred to LKSD. Thus, commencing with my first year as principal and LKSD's third year in Quinhagak, we found ourselves responsible for a K–12 program, two separate campuses a half-mile apart, and approximately 150 students.

The contrast between the two campuses is extreme. The high school is an 11,000 square foot, two million dollar, state-of-the-art educational facility. The elementary school consists of three 20-year old buildings, which have been moved a quarter of a mile from their original site at the same time the high school was being built at a cost greater than that of the new high school. I once wondered why the state and federal governments didn't combine resources and build a K–12 facility for three million dollars, saving each a half million dollars in capital costs and LKSD $100,000 a year in operating costs. Fortunately, after eight years in Alaska, I have learned not to dwell on the actions of

government, as doing so is much like trying to teach a pig to read—it doesn't work, and it just upsets the pig!

I believe that the biggest impact of Senate Bill 35, Hootch-Tobeluk, and the emergence of LKSD has been the advent of the teenage high-school student living at home and going to school in the village. Prior to 1979, such a beast did not exist in Quinhagak. At the end of the eighth grade, students either went away to boarding school or stayed in the village and took their places as adults. All those parenting skills necessary to deal with teenage high-school students had never evolved. Couple this with the BIA's "school without failure at any cost" philosophy, and the contrasting structure of a high school with defined curriculum, discrete courses, graduation requirements, attendance policies, Carnegie units, and occasional homework, and you can begin to see the potential for a whole lot of conflict going on.

The problem of immediate concern is our ever-decreasing budget allocations. Quinhagak's allocation for the 1984–1985 school year is more than 13 percent less than was our allocation for the 1982–1983 school year. These decreases have necessitated the elimination of four certificated positions and the equivalent of two classified positions. In addition, no staff or student travel is being funded from the school operating fund. Provided that the state appropriates the funds to build an elementary addition to the high school, I can cut another $100,000 from my budget. However, at that point, I'll be as lean and mean as I think I can get, and my cost per student will still be approximately $7,000 per year not considering district level administration. This is two to three times the per student cost in Anchorage. And, I'm lucky! I have a relatively large student population. Many of the schools in Western Alaska have less than 50 students.

I hope that the next time you read one of those newspaper articles about how we have more money than we know what to do with and aren't doing a very good job in the classroom, you'll temper those remarks with those made herein. We are just out of our infancy and we are trying to build a tradition of education and an appreciation for academic achievement in an environment where neither had existed before, where a different language and culture prevail, and where our economics of education simply are not the same.

Reflections

Esther Cox
Anchorage, Alaska
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Nenana, Alaska. Small town in the interior of Alaska with the Big Band Sound! One—two; one—two; hit it! Bill Searle, the band director, was not surprised at the sound that came from his stage band, but this visitor nearly fell out of her chair. I just had not expected so much polish from a stage band pulled together from a student population of fewer than 200, grades K–12. An electric piano, set of drums, six each of trombones, trumpets, and saxophones cleared the dust from the air in the first few notes, and the sound that continued was hot and clear. Bill's first trumpet looked a tad short, so later when I saw him in the hall, I was able to confirm that he was a seventh grader. I have a natural eye for that age, man! Said that he plays the trumpet lots at home. Said, too, that Bill was his dad! Fine looking young man with a very mature trumpet sound. Nenana schools are justly proud of their music program!

I was lucky enough to be included in the Northwest Accreditation Team that visited the Nenana City Public Schools for four days. Jim Fredrickson, Principal from King Cove, Bob Bellmore, Principal at Nome-Beltz, Lou Heinbockel, Assistant Principal at Delta Junction, and I comprised the validation team for the K–12 schools. I assume that Superintendent Wayne Taylor and Principal Ken Satre pulled the team together.

It was a dandy. Everyone tended to business, wrote volumes, and spent the working hours doing just that. The timing for the team was excellent. Enough time had been allowed so we could visit at night and not have to write until one or two o'clock in the morning... this gave me a chance to talk program with the superintendent. They are extremely pleased with what they are doing.

Computer assisted instruction is evident as computers are available to students in every classroom, K–12. Even the little shavers know how to use a word processing program and do much of their composing on the computer.

The teachers are warm and competent and willing to work very hard. Many extracurricular activities are offered to the students in their school and the same folks who work with them during the day are the ones who keep this activity program going.

The planned addition of several high-school rooms and a new library was out to bid when we were in Nenana, and the building program is due to begin this spring. The staff is really looking forward to dividing the big kids from the little ones, once this addition is completed. Several specialized areas are a part of this building plan, and with the remodeling of what will be the elementary school nearly completed, a mighty nice plant will house Nenana students.

Ken Satre is the principal who talks in narrative. Everything he says sounds like a story! I told him that he needs to write a book since he has been in the school business in some really remote spots in Alaska and has worked with a real variety of folks. He maintained that he would have to do a whole chapter on Bob Bellmore, and he wasn't sure that Bob was up to that! He has some real interesting tales about Dutch Harbor! His staff thinks that he is very special because he gives a large measure of educational leadership and sprinkles it liberally with humor.

Wayne Taylor took us through the old Episcopal log church that has been housing a congregation since the 1800s. The cover on the altar is white moose hide, beautifully beaded, and completely in sync with the log construction and the aged pews. We also got the full history of the Ice Classic and for my first time, had a close-up view of the famous tripod. I did not know that the process of stopping the clock has not been tampered with since the inception of the Ice Classic. When the ice moves the distance that it must to trip the rope, it does not stop the clock but springs loose the axe that drops and cuts that rope which stops the clock! And it should be doing that about now!

Nenana was a neat trip for all the team members and, as usual, a real boon to my own professional growth. I know that spending a year on a self-study and then waiting to see if a team will validate that study is a long process; however, the professional growth of the staff was evident. I only hope they learned as much as I did. They were good teachers!

Assistant Principals Are Human

Dick Hultberg
Kenai, Alaska

Reprinted from Totem Tales, November 1985

Assistant principals, believe it or not, are human. They come in both sexes, but mostly male. They also come in various sizes, depending sometimes on whether you are looking for one or trying to hide from one; however, they are mostly **big**.

They are found everywhere; in the halls, in bathrooms, on roofs, behind cars, and sometimes in your hair. They are there when it counts the most. The best way to meet one is to become an attendance problem at school.

Assistant principals wear different hats at different times; they are disciplinarians, teachers, counselors, nurses, parents, secretaries, cafeteria workers, policemen, traffic cops, or custodians.

They give sermons, lectures, and bad news. They are required to have the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, and the disposition of a lamb. They are the people who call parents, swallow hard, and announce to them that their son or daughter has been caught with drugs or alcohol. They then spend the rest of the day wondering why they ever took such a crummy job.

In the movies, the assistant principal is an oaf who couldn't find a bull fiddle in a telephone booth (*Breakfast Club*). In real life, he is expected to act with a sense of extreme calm when young Harry Hood flips him the bird. In fiction, the assistant principal gets his help from private "eyes" and parents. In reality mostly all he gets from the public is, "You must be mistaken; my son or daughter wouldn't do those things."

When assistant principals issue a suspension, they are monsters. If they let you go, they are easy. To little children, they are either a friend or bogeyman, depending on what an older brother and sister has said or done at school.

They work long hours, Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. They know what all buses look like from the inside out. They know, in no uncertain terms, how some students feel about them from early morning obscene phone calls. They have sat in every gymnasium in Alaska many times.

A assistant principal is like the little girl who, "when she was good, she was very, very good, but when she was bad..."

Many assistant principals have homes; some are colored egg yellow, but most are covered with mortgages. If he drives a big car, "He's got it made!" A small car, "Who is he kidding?"

Assistant principals raise lots of kids, most of whom belong to others. An assistant principal sees more misery, tears, and trouble than any other person except a divorce lawyer. One minute he may solve a world crisis in his office, the next minute all hell breaks loose in the hall. Assistant principals like days off for vacations, family, and coffee, but not necessarily in that order. They don't like hot rods, buses, clocks, telephones, and gymnasiums. They have associations, but can't strike. They must be impartial, courteous, and always there. This is sometimes hard when a parent reminds them that they are always watching or picking on a son or daughter.

As assistant principal's most rewarding moment comes when, after graduation, he or she gets a big hug from some future engineer or teacher. The assistant principal looks into grateful eyes and hears: "Thank you for all you have done."

Curt Loe Speaks Out In Yakutat

Curt Loe
Yakutat, Alaska
Reprinted from Totem Tale, —May 1987

Students say they are depressed and they surely are. They say they are depressed because they have nothing to do. Over and over again I hear students, parents, and others saying the kids need more activities. If they just had more to do, we would not have problems of depression, alcohol, and drug abuse. My response is always the same—there is no shortage of activities in Los Angeles and other cities around the country—neither is there any shortage of drug and alcohol abuse or of teenage depression and suicide in those places. The problem is not that there is not enough to do. The problem is a personal crisis—where am I going—what does my future hold—a futility borne of apprehension over their future and the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness in that future is a major cause of depression.

We can provide hundreds of activities but until we deal with this very basic issue, we will never see any significant changes in our young people. Until kids have a supportive, secure family and home as a safe harbor; until we have a school which not only provides the tools for success but fosters the belief that with those tools students can carve out whatever life they are willing to work for, the cycle will continue.

"Willing to work for"—that phrase brings us to a second important cause of depression among young people—or any people. We have established a culture in which we demand and generally receive immediate gratification. We generally get what we want and we get it **now**! Gratification may come in various forms:

- ...readily available and easily obtainable **things**: boats, three-wheelers, stereos, cars;
- ...the statistics on sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, and venereal disease seem to indicate that sexual gratification is becoming more easily obtainable and at increasingly younger ages;
- ...**action and thrills** are waiting at the push of a button on tape and TV for arm chair adventurers who settle for vicarious lives. The problems begin when *Miami Vice* ends and there is nothing there;

- ...**drugs** and **alcohol** certainly provide immediate gratification; at least they mask the nothingness.

We have become oriented toward excitement, flash, and dash as the norm and any time we come down to the reality of ordinary day-to-day life, the word that immediately comes to mind is **boring**. Once we convince ourselves of our **boring** existence is it any wonder that we are depressed?

Another problem with demanding immediate gratification is that the whole idea is diametrically opposed to the idea of setting goals and working diligently to accomplish those goals. The ability to postpone the celebration until after the victory is won is one cornerstone of a successful, productive life.

There is no doubt that depression is a very real problem and can sometimes be devastating. Neither is there any doubt that some of the major causes of depression are well within our power to impact. We certainly need to provide activities which are sufficient in number and variety (there is life beyond basketball), but we have to look beyond our usual response—to lengthen the list of activities available to students. We have to look at attitudes and values, at schooling, at community mores, at families in turmoil, and hardest of all, we have to look at ourselves and the role models that we are presenting.

Delta Principal Shares Ideas For Easing Budget Cuts

Ron Beck
Delta Junction, Alaska
Reprinted from Totem Tales, December 1986

Obituary or challenge? The general impression one has after reading news releases from Juneau is that education is in a world of hurt in the next years. We have been told that as principals we are the ones who have to protect and hold our schools together. We will no doubt be cut in every area of our budgets again this spring. It will be necessary to lay off staff. Important classified staff will be history, and on, and on, and on. Now is the time, together as a Principals' Association, that we need to share ideas on how to keep education alive in our communities. We need to do more than give lip service to the idea that we as principals can make the difference.

We, here in Delta, have already felt the pinch. As we saw this coming, the idea of a Parent Volunteer Program came up in a brainstorming session with the staff. Working together with the teachers has made this a reality in our schools in Delta. Although this is the first time this program has been undertaken, there are already 52 volunteers of which 35 are regularly assigned. The remainder are helping out when they can. The volunteers assist teachers in their classes, work in the office, help in the library, and do many other important duties. They all help kids.

All persons who volunteer are asked to fill out a form giving basic information about themselves, the names and grades of their children, certain skills they possess that would assist at the school, hobbies they can share, and a bit about jobs they have held in the past. They then attend a general meeting where they are informed about the nuts and bolts of their volunteer work, learn the rules and principles of the school, and hear from the teachers what services they could provide. Already this year these volunteers have provided over 700 hours of unpaid help to the school and our kids. One thing we guaranteed to the volunteers was they will be kept busy and they have been. We have one parent who works very closely with me as the parent in charge of the program. This is their program, and folks, it's working. We have had a few predicted problems, but don't we always when we try something new?

In the area of activities, we have also taken a sharp cut in funds. Our plan this year was to generate more activity funds, to help offset budget reductions, by the following methods:

- Require all high-school students, grades 9 through 12, to purchase a student activity pass for $5. This pass will entitle the student to attend all home events without additional costs.
- Increase the admission charges for athletic events.
- Sell "Delta High Booster" passes, which will allow the purchaser to attend all school-sponsored athletic events (home) without further cost.
- Depend upon additional community volunteers and helpers at activities.

The schedule of charges for spectators to attend individual events will be increased as follows:

Volleyball: Adults, $3; Elementary and Junior High Students, $1

Basketball: Adults, $4; Elementary and Junior High Students, $1

Wrestling: Adults, $3; Elementary and Junior High Students, $1

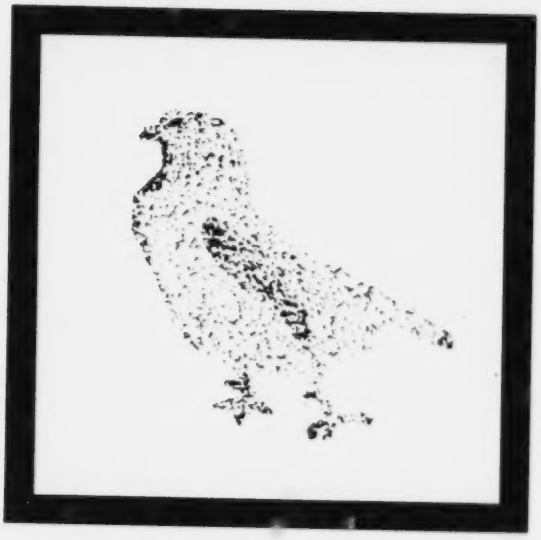
Kindergarten and preschool children will be admitted free when accompanied by an adult.

Rifle, cross-country, hockey, and track and field will continue to admit spectators without charge as the facilities used for these events do not have limited access so admission stands cannot be established.

In addition, we will be selling "Delta High Husky Booster" season passes this year at the following rates: Individual, $30; Family, $50. Family passes will include two adults and all elementary and junior high family members. These passes will entitle the purchasers to be admitted to all home activities (except Regional Tournaments) without additional charge.

Lou Heinbockel, our assistant principal, compiled the following information on the money generated by the sale of activity passes. We have issued 148 student passes and collected approximately $5 x 125 = $625. Family passes sold 35 x $50 = $1,750. Individual passes sold 29 x $30 = $870. Total amount generated from the sale of passes equals $3,245 as of November 24, 1986. In addition, we have reduced all referee fees by 10% for the 1986–1987 school year.

These are only a couple ideas we are trying here at Delta. If every principal in our association would share just one idea they are using to fight the funding battle, it would give us all ammunition to win the war.



Chignik Lake Students Gain Self-Confidence by Trying to Eliminate National Debt

David Smith
Chignik Lake, Alaska
Reprinted from Totem Tales, January 1986

Being the principal of a K–12 school is decidedly different from being the principal of a high school or an elementary school. It is not unlike a very large family where the younger children model and mimic the older students. This occurs in more conventional settings but the range is not as extreme.

Should you have some older students who don't like to come to school or are particularly negative, the effect on the younger students is readily apparent. The converse is also true. Positive models at the upper levels tend to mold a positive school culture at the lower levels.

With this in mind, the staff at Chignik Lake School decided to attack the perpetual problem of "I'm bored" and "School's a drag" by focusing on improving the self-concept of students and staff. One particular event was to get the students involved in causes. The high-school students in a speech class decided to try to eliminate the national debt.

Sounds like an impossible task? Perhaps, but the concern that their future could evaporate before their eyes under the weight of the debt galvanized them into giving speeches. They started on the local level with their drive and a thousand dollars was donated which they sent to the President. They mounted a letter-writing campaign to public officials to express their concern. They were invited to give speeches in neighboring communities and even spoke briefly on the Alaska Statewide News.

Talk about confidence! As the bulletin board at school began to reflect the answers from President Reagan, Governor Sheffield, Senators, and interested individuals, they could see that even kids in the remote Alaska Bush could make an impact. The message is, "We can cause the effects in our lives."

The younger students are positively affected by the attention directed at their older schoolmates. The lessons on developing a positive self-image that they are receiving from

their teachers results in fewer management problems at the school. Instead of viewing problems as negative issues, the staff and students are seeing them as opportunities to practice the skills that they are learning. There is no better place to learn to deal with conflict and confusion than on a daily basis at school and home.

The parents are seeing positive changes in their children and in a recent survey indicated that they definitely wanted the program to continue. They know that individuals with good self-concepts are much more capable of handling life's problems constructively.

In my 26 years in the field of education ranging from the college level to the elementary classroom, administration in the Bush is by far the most challenging job that I have encountered. It is also one of the most rewarding. So... if any of you are looking for a challenge, you know where to find it.

Principals Are Special, Caring People

Bob Hahn
Anchorage, Alaska
Reprinted from Totem Tales, September 1989

I am constantly reminded of the quality of principals we have in our secondary schools across Alaska and the United States. Do you know how to determine who principals are in a crowded hotel lobby full of people? All you have to do is throw a piece of paper on the floor and step back. Principals will kill themselves diving for the loose paper.

Bill Butler and I were waiting for Larry Graham in our hotel lobby before going to the annual Alaska dinner at the National Conference last year. Bill has been retired from the principalship a number of years. However, he has not forgotten his training or lost his quickness. We both spotted a piece of paper on the floor; we almost cracked heads as we bent down to pick it up. I decided to see if it was only a coincidence or if a person could predict who was a principal by watching who picked paper up off the floor. I want to report that in the next 10 minutes 12 people picked up the same piece of paper, and every one of them was a principal. As they picked up the paper, I asked them where they were principals. Picking up paper may be a small thing, but by taking care of the small tasks, the big projects are done right, too.

Last spring I happened to be at a junior high school for a concert. As the concert started, parents kept coming in to find not enough chairs from them to be seated. Within a few minutes, three people were putting up more chairs for the parents. We looked at each other and started laughing. All of us were principals, but not at this particular school. To serve others is a big part of our job description. We do it without thinking.

The third example happened when the presidents-elect of all the states' principals' organizations met in Washington, D.C. We had a chance to get a VIP tour of the White House. There were about 45 of us in our group. As we came to points of special interest, we all stumbled over each other, stepping aside to make sure everyone else could hear and see. It became funny after the third or fourth stop. We all felt better when four elderly ladies somehow got mixed up with our group. We finally had someone to expend our caring energy to help. The ladies were shown more concern than anyone who has ever toured the White House.

Barbra Streisand sings a song which says, "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world." We, as principals, are people who need people. Through others achieving, we get the special feeling of achieving, too.

Students may not remember what they were taught, but they will never forget how they were treated. We are the key people who set the climate for our schools. As the school year starts, we must constantly remember the students and staff watch us closely. They listen more to what we "**do**" than what we say. When they know we care, they will care, too! They wait for us to reach out first. We are the leaders and must be the risk takers to set a climate of caring.

The teachers and students do not often see board members or superintendents. They see you, the principal. In the real world of the school, you are **the one the school rotates around**. A positive, caring principal can be compared to a smart farmer who herds cats. He knows yelling or chasing them does not work. He puts a bowl of milk down and says nice things to them as he moves the bowl out of the barn. They will follow him anywhere.

Your positive example of caring is "the bowl of milk" for your students and staff. You are the key person for this school year to be successful. Take care; we need your leadership in your school, our state, and in the Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals.

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